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Savannah, Hinesville, Fort Stewart growing faster than state, experts say

Walter Jones | Thursday, November 15, 2007 at 12:30 am



ATLANTA - Metro Savannah and the Hinesville/Fort Stewart areas are expected to add jobs faster than the rest of the state, according to a quarterly outlook released Wednesday by the Economic Forecasting Center at Georgia State University.

While job expansion overall in Georgia will slow to 1.7 percent for the balance of 2007 and by an even more modest 1.3 percent next year, Savannah's work force growth will pick up steam by 2.2 percent this year and 2.9 percent the next.

The Hinesville/Fort Stewart metropolitan area will do even better, adding jobs at a 2.9 percent rate this year and 3.2 percent in 2008, according to the forecast.

"In the third quarter of 2007, Savannah's job market exhibited a decent 2.0 percent increase, or 3,200 jobs," Rajeev Dhawan, director of the Forecasting Center, wrote in the report.

He tallied the winning sectors: 990 jobs in professional and business services, 530 in leisure and hospitality, 440 in

government, 390 in retailing and 320 in education and health.

"Despite a projected statewide slowdown in 2007 and 2008, Savannah is poised for decent growth," he wrote.

Dhawan attributes much of the growth to record-setting volume at the Georgia Ports Authority and shippers who are locating distribution facilities nearby.

That's an assessment shared by John Lawrence, assistant director of work force information and analysis at the Georgia Department of Labor.

"Savannah's strength, of course, is the port," he said.

Additionally, tourism and an influx of retirees build on the port business, Lawrence said.

The aging of baby boomers not only adds retail vitality to the area, but the vacancies they create when they retire hold the unemployment rate lower than it would have been 20 years ago, he said.

There's a different reason Hinesville/Fort Stewart is growing faster than the state. The area is enjoying the level of growth enjoyed by Georgia's other major military towns, Dhawan said.

For the state as a whole, the slowing expansion is due to the subprime mortgage crisis and its fallout.

The state's economy will bog down with the effects of the mortgage crisis, which is eliminating jobs in the financial and construction sectors and causing corporate executives to hesitate about implementing expansion plans, Dhawan said.

"The only star on the horizon is the education and health-care sector that will keep on growing," he wrote. "However, this sector will be unable to make up for the shortfall of the corporate sector and the ongoing slowdown in residential construction."

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