

LABOR IN LIVINGSTON

Numbers could change

By Luke Smucker

Staff Reporter

The latest report from the Illinois Department of Employment Security concludes that metro areas across the state have experienced increases in their over-the-year unemployment rate. In Livingston County, the unemployment rate increased from 6.8 percent in 2016, to 7 percent in January. The report also states that Illinois' unemployment rate, 5.7 percent, is higher than the national unemployment rate reported for January 2017, which increased to 4.8 percent.

There are many factors that can contribute to an increase in unemployment. In its January statewide unemployment report, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity Director Sean McCarthy said, "If Illinois had grown at the same rate as the nation since the beginning of the recovery in 2010, we would have an additional 222,700 jobs. With a balanced budget and structural changes that will create jobs, our economy will be better able to provide opportunities for Illinois families."

There are a number of factors that could cause the area unemployment rate to adjust, but not all of these factors are easy to quantify, from a city administration's perspective.

"Some people may have found other employment outside the city," City Administrator Bob Karls said. "We also have a number of people who live outside of the Pontiac area that come here, specifically for work. While we can't always explain exactly why the unemployment rate changes, we can say that we've added a significant amount of employment opportunities through our local employers."

Some of the latest employment increases for the city have come from the Caterpillar plant in Pontiac, which announced last January that it would be bringing in 160 out-of-state jobs to the area. Other opportunities have come with the recent completion of the new Good Samaritan-Pontiac facility and the pending completion of the Hampton Inn hotel on the west side

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of the city. Outside of the city, Selig Sealing in Forrest and Technical Metals in Fairbury have also added a number of positions.

“Employment opportunities in Livingston County and particularly in the city of Pontiac are plentiful,” Adam Dontz, CEO of the Greater Livingston County Economic Development Council agreed. “Not only in manufacturing, but health care and service industries. There are job opportunities at the Pontiac Caterpillar facility and the new Hampton Inn hotel is underway with its hiring processes, as are other employers in the city.

“Also, the Economic Development Council is working with ATR

recycling in Pontiac for the creation of up to 26 new positions at its corporate headquarters. Outside of the county, Selig Sealing in Forrest continues to hire as a result of its 25,000 square-foot expansion and Technical Metals in Fairbury is hiring, as well.”

One problem that many employers are facing, is how to make use of an employment pool of generally unqualified candidates. To assist with the issue locally, the GLCEDC developed its Fundamentals of Modern Manufacturing program with Heartland Community College.

“The biggest thing I hear from our employers, is they are looking for people with a strong work ethic and a desire to learn new things,” Dontz said. “Employers often have great training programs, but they

need to find people that want to work and want to learn new skills.”

Because of the partnership that the GLCEDC has with manufacturers, not only in Pontiac, but across Livingston County, the GLCEDC has tailored the six-week 100-hour manufacturing skills training program to the needs of local employers and consequently, the program has an 82 percent job placement rate.

“So, 8 out of 10 people who go through the class are employed as a result of the program,” Dontz said. “Our classes have been held at the Caterpillar facility and we’ve had 38 graduates since 2013.”

Those who would like additional skills training in manufacturing can contact Dontz at 815-829-2900, or email Adam@GLCEDC.com.