



Mobile, Ala., forecast at No. 13 for job growth next spring

By Jeff Amy

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(Press-Register/Bill Starling)

The Mobile skyline is seen from across the Mobile River at the Austal USA facility Wednesday, Mar. 21, 2007. Mobile County is expected to have the 13th fastest job growth, in percentage terms, among U.S. metro areas in the first three months of 2010, according to a forecast released earlier this month by Moody's Economy.com.

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Moody's said employment would rise 1.3 percent.

The outlook highlights the belief of many economists that Mobile, despite an 11.1 percent jobless rate in September, is set to recover quickly, led by international trade and the **ThyssenKrupp AG** steel plant in Calvert.

But at the same time, Alabama and Mississippi are expected to take as many as four years to return to pre-recession employment levels, according to a separate forecast from **IHS Global Insight**, another firm.

"They were hit particularly hard by the recession because they have such a large manufacturing base," Karl Kuykendall, an IHS economist, said of the states.

In Alabama, 11.1 percent fewer residents had a job in September 2009 than two years earlier, an employment decline of 233,000.

In Mississippi, 3 percent fewer residents had a job in September 2009 than in September 2007, a drop of 33,000.

Kuykendall said he expects jobs to shrink in Alabama and Mississippi until early 2010, with an upswing starting in the second quarter.

"Alabama for sure, and I think Mississippi, will outpace the nation," Kuykendall said. Still, he expects pretty high unemployment for five to six years because of the number of jobs that evaporated in such a short period.

Mobile County saw the number of residents who have jobs fall 8.9 percent between September 2007 and September 2009, according to employment statistics.

The projected growth in the Moody's study would still leave Mobile 7.8 percent short of job levels from two years ago. The county's September jobless rate was worse than Alabama's 10.2 percent and the nation's 9.8 percent.

The Moody's list was highlighted by college towns, including Auburn and Tuscaloosa, and military towns such as Huntsville and Columbus, Ga. The state of Texas claimed 10 of 25 spots, including its largest metro areas and four Mexican border towns.

Besides border towns, other areas that benefit from international trade are expected to rebound.

"The weak dollar will provide a boost to communities with international trading ports," as well as cities on the Mexican border, wrote BusinessWeek magazine, which commissioned the Moody's survey.

Moody's has consistently issued bullish outlooks for Mobile. In February 2008, the **firm predicted** that Mobile County would have the fastest growing economy from 2007 through 2012 of all 363 American metropolitan areas. The county's growth so far has not kept pace with the cumulative 34.31 percent growth in that five-year outlook.

Earlier this year, Forbes Magazine columnist Joel Kotkin rated Mobile the 10th best mid-sized metro area for job growth.

Moody's Economy.com forecasts that Mobile will see the 13th fastest job growth among U.S. metropolitan areas in the first quarter of 2010. Here are the five fastest growing areas, plus regional metro areas that made the list:

1. Mount Vernon, Wash., 2.7 percent
2. Huntsville, 2.6 percent
3. McAllen, Texas, 2.6 percent
4. Brownsville, Texas, 2.2 percent
5. Auburn, 1.9 percent
12. Columbus, Ga.-Ala., 1.4 percent
13. Mobile, 1.3 percent
20. Tuscaloosa, 1 percent

Source: Moody's Economy.com

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