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Area's jobless rate fell in March

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BY HOWARD OWEN

The Fredericksburg area's jobless rate declined in March, but numbers can be deceiving.

Unemployment in the George Washington Regional Commission (Fredericksburg and Caroline, King George, Spotsylvania and Stafford counties) went from 7.4 percent in February to 7.1 percent in March, according to the Virginia Employment Commission.

Those numbers aren't adjusted for seasonal factors, though. According to the VEC, March unemployment often shows an uptick as companies prepare for the tourist season. Also, February's numbers probably were affected by the winter's record snowfalls.

Thus, while the state's unemployment rate for March fell, from 7.8 percent in February to 7.6 percent in March, the seasonally adjusted rate rose, from 7.2 to 7.4. That 7.4 percent figure is the highest monthly rate since February of 1983.

The state and region continue to weather the economic crisis better than most.

Of the state's 21 planning districts, only those in Northern Virginia and the Charlottesville area fared better than the Fredericksburg region in March. At 6.3 percent unemployment, Spotsylvania and Stafford counties were tied with Fauquier for eighth-best among the state's localities.

Virginia's 7.6 percent unadjusted unemployment rate for March continues to be well below the nation's (10.2 percent) and is the 12th lowest rate in the U.S.

Arlington County has the lowest unemployment rate (4.8 percent), while Martinsville has the highest (22.0 percent).

In Fredericksburg and in each of the nine counties served by the Free Lance-Star, the unadjusted jobless numbers for March were lower than they were in February. Adjusted rates for the region weren't available.

Howard Owen: 540/374-5539

Email: howen@freelancestar.com

LOCALITY

March '10

Feb. '10

March '09

Fredericksburg

10.4%

10.7%

10.0%

Stafford

6.3%

6.5%

5.4%

Spotsylvania

6.3%

6.6%

5.8%

Caroline

10.1%

10.5%

9.0%

King George

9.1%

9.2%

8.3%

Westmoreland

9.5%

9.9%

8.5%

Orange

8.8%

9.3%

8.0%

Fauquier

6.3%

6.6%

5.6%

Culpeper

9.2%

9.4%

8.8%

Louisa

9.0%

9.5%

7.8%