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Region's jobless rate fell in April

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BY BILL FREEHLING
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Unemployment levels in the Fredericksburg area fell to the lowest point this year in April, which is typically one of the best months for the labor market.

The jobless rate in the George Washington Regional Commission planning district--which comprises Fredericksburg and Caroline, King George, Spotsylvania and Stafford counties--was 6 percent in April, according to data released yesterday by the Virginia Employment Commission.

That was the highest rate for April in the George Washington Region since 1992, when it was 6.7 percent. It was nearly twice the rate of last April. Yet the April rate was lower in the region than it was in January, February or March.

It was about the same story for the area's individual localities--lower rates than in March, but significantly higher than the previous April. Stafford County had the state's 10th-lowest jobless rate, followed closely by Fauquier and Spotsylvania.

April has been Virginia's best month for unemployment for each of the past two years, according to the VEC. Students remain in school, and the tourism industry perks up with tours and the opening of theme parks. There was some expansion in the health care field.

The VEC predicts that "unemployment likely will remain high throughout the summer" as students enter a weak job market and the fallout continues from dealer cutbacks and production shutdowns at Chrysler and General Motors.

VEC chief economist Bill Mezger noted that construction jobs dropped in April from the month before. He said it's one of the first times he can remember that happening.

Virginia's jobless rate was 6.6 percent in April, up from 3.2 percent last April but below the national rate of 8.6 percent. It was also down from 6.9 percent in March.

Arlington County had the lowest jobless rate in the state, at 4.1 percent. Martinsville's 20.2 percent rate was Virginia's highest. Twenty-six of the state's 134 localities had double-digit unemployment last month.

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Here are the unemployment percentages in the George Washington Regional Commission planning district for each April back to 1990. The district includes Fredericksburg and Caroline, King George, Stafford and Spotsylvania counties.

2009: 6.0

2008: 3.1

2007: 2.5

2006: 2.5

2005: 2.9

2004: 2.9

2003: 3.3

2002: 3.2

2001: 1.9

2000: 1.6

1999: 1.6

1998: 1.7

1997: 3.0

1996: 3.4

1995: 3.7

1994: 3.9

1993: 4.8

1992: 6.7

1991: 6.7

1990: 3.4

LOCALITY

April '09

March '09

April '08

Fredericksburg

9.4%

10.0%

4.9%

Stafford

5.2%

5.4%

2.8%

Spotsylvania

5.5%

5.8%

2.7%

Caroline

8.4%

9.0%

3.8%

King George

7.8%

8.3%

4.2%

Westmoreland

7.5%

8.5%

3.9%

Orange

7.5%

8.0%

3.9%

Fauquier

5.3%

5.6%

2.6%

Culpeper

7.9%

8.8%

3.8%

Louisa

7.6%

7.8%

3.3%

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