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Joblessness for region: 6.3 percent

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BY BILL FREEHLING
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Continued economic weakness pushed the regional unemployment rate to 6.3 percent in May, the highest for that month since 1992.

Yesterday's data release from the Virginia Employment Commission wasn't all bad. The city of Fredericksburg's jobless rate remained in single digits for the second-straight month, and the regional rate was below both the state and nation's. Fauquier and Stafford counties both had a 5.4 percent rate in May, tied for eighth best in the state.

The jobless rate for the George Washington Regional Commission planning dis-trict--Fredericksburg and Caroline, King George, Stafford and Spotsylvania counties--last touched 6 percent for May in 1992, when it was 6.7 percent.

The 6.3 percent rate for May was slightly above April's 6 percent rate but pretty much consistent with where it's been for the first five months of 2009.

The city of Fredericksburg, which has been hit harder by a construction slowdown, had a 9.6 percent rate in May. The city's rate was 9.4 percent in April and had been in double-digits the three months before that.

Virginia's seasonally unadjusted jobless rate for May was 7 percent, up from 6.6 percent in April and 3.6 percent in May 2008. The national rate was 9.1 percent in May.

Most Virginia localities had jobless rates in May that were nearly double the levels of the year before. Northern Virginia continued to have the state's best labor market, while the counties bordering North Carolina are getting hit hardest. Twenty-four state localities had double-digit jobless rates in May.

VEC Chief Economist Bill Mezger said the jobless rate was pushed higher by layoffs in the auto industry and college students entering the "worst job market for graduates in nearly 30 years."

Mezger expects June jobless rates to creep higher due to high school students entering the labor market, layoffs in the auto industry and general economic weakness. The VEC did note that federal stimulus dollars are starting to create jobs.

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

2009: 6.3 2008: 3.5 2007: 2.5 2006: 2.4 2005: 3.0 2004: 3.0 2003: 3.3 2002: 3.2 2001: 2.2 2000: 1.9
1999: 1.7 1998: 1.9 1997: 3.1 1996: 3.6 1995: 3.7 1994: 3.5 1993: 4.9 1992: 6.7 1991: 6.4 1990: 3.9

LOCALITY

May '09

April '09

May '08

Fredericksburg

9.6%

9.3%

5.5%

Stafford

5.4%

5.2%

3.1%

Spotsylvania

5.8%

5.5%

3.1%

Caroline

8.7%

8.5%

4.3%

King George

7.9%

7.7%

4.8%

Westmoreland

7.7%

7.5%

4.5%

Orange

7.8%

7.6%

4.4%

Fauquier

5.4%

5.3%

3.0%

Culpeper

8.2%

7.9%

4.4%

Louisa

8.0%

7.7%

3.9%

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