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Stanislaus jobless rate inches up again for July, but some are finding work



The new Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market at 2480 Geer Road in Turlock had its grand opening Wednesday (8-14-13). The company hired some 95 workers to staff the 24-hour grocery store. Cashier Maria Pina, 20, of Modesto rings up Denair resident Megan Rock, with her 4-month-old daughter Morgan.

MARIJKE ROWLAND — The Modesto Bee [Buy Photo](#)

STANISLAUS COUNTY — As the region continues to claw its way out of the dark hole it found itself in after the recession, workers like Aaron Valera are finding out what it feels like to finally reach the light.

The 44-year-old Modesto resident lost his retail job in 2008. Since then, he hadn't been able to find steady work until he was hired, on a part-time basis, by the new Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market in Turlock. The 24-hour grocery offshoot of the megaretailer opened Wednesday with a staff of some 95

employees, in a space once occupied by Mervyn's. Many moved from different jobs, but some, including Valera, found their first employment since the free-fall collapse of the area economy.

Since February, the Stanislaus County unemployment rate has fluctuated between 2 and 3 percentage points lower than a year ago. In July, the rate crept up slightly from the previous month, hitting 12.9 percent compared to 12.7 percent in June. A year ago, unemployment was at 15.7 percent.

The rate generally has followed seasonal hiring trends this year, with ebbs and flows depending on industry cycles. The California Employment Development Department reported Friday that the state's jobless rate inched up as well, to 8.7 percent for July from 8.5 percent in June.

Stanislaus County's slight increase from June was driven largely by agricultural trends. Once seasonal hiring starts again in August, the rate historically has taken another significant drop, reaching its lowest point each year in September.

July's numbers were bolstered by retail hiring and transportation/warehousing job gains, said EDD labor market analyst Nati Martinez. From June to July, the county added 200 retail jobs. And from year to year, there were 400 retail and 500 transportation/warehousing jobs added.

Valley residents are looking to major companies such as Wal-Mart and incoming Amazon as ways to find work or upgrade from their current jobs. Wal-Mart Communications Director Delia Garcia said that as of April, the average hourly full-time wage for the chain's California associates was \$12.99. The Amazon distribution centers being completed in Patterson and Tracy both start entry-level associates at \$13.50 an hour.

Workers at the Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market previously worked in fast food, restaurants, retail and more. New hire Adriana Martinez used to work for Mervyn's and even spent time in the Turlock store. The 34-year-old Modesto resident said she was happy to be back in the building, now with Wal-Mart. After Mervyn's closed, she worked in a restaurant full time but chose to take a part-time position at Wal-Mart for the benefits and atmosphere.

"I like the store, I like how they work," Martinez said. "I applied at several places before this. And I was really excited when I got the call."

Although retail and warehousing are doing well, construction hit a summer lull and fell 1,000 jobs behind where it was last year. The construction industry remains one of the last to see a strong surge in recovery. It was one of the fields hardest hit after the mortgage crisis fallout.

Stanislaus County continues to exceed the state and nation in its unemployment rate, as it has historically even before the recession hit.

The U.S. unemployment rate dropped slightly to 7.4 percent in July.

Some 1.6 million Californians remained unemployed in July. In Stanislaus County, there were 30,800 unemployed job seekers last month.

New Wal-Mart hire Brian Gomes, 22, of Hilmar said he came back to the company after working at Dollar General for a year and a half.

"It's very exciting to see people coming in and applying and seeing all the fresh, new faces," Gomes said. "There are new people in the community working."

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

<http://www.modbee.com/2013/08/16/2867181/stanislaus-jobless-rate-inches.html>