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## **Biz Buzz: County unemployment falls slightly**

San Luis Obispo County's unemployment rate continued to be well below most communities in California in December, falling one-tenth of a percent compared to the previous month. That figure, however, was still above the unemployment rate in December 2008.

The state's Employment Development Department recorded 9.4 percent in December, down from a revised 9.5 percent in November and above 7.1 percent in December 2008. A total of 13,000 people were jobless but actively seeking work in December, out of a labor force of 138,800.

The county lost the most jobs in leisure and hospitality, a total of 700 jobs from December 2008 to December 2009. Trade, transportation and utilities lost 500 jobs, construction lost 400 jobs and government lost 200 jobs, compared to the same month in 2008.

Educational and health services gained 100 jobs in that period.

Government and trade, transportation and utilities were the only sectors to see an increase in jobs (200 and 100 jobs respectively) from November 2009 to December 2009.

The figures are the latest available from the state. January's unemployment rate will not be released until March 5. Brad Kemp, an economist who watches county jobs closely, said recently that the county's unemployment rate is currently near, or at, its peak. Kemp, director of regional research for San Rafael-based Beacon Economics, believes the unemployment rate should gradually fall throughout this year as jobs slowly return.

The counties of San Luis Obispo and San Francisco had the fifth lowest unemployment rate in the state in December, followed by Santa Barbara (9.3 percent), Orange (9.1 percent), San Mateo (8.6 percent), and Marin (7.8 percent). California's unemployment rate was 12.4 percent in December, unchanged from November 2009 but above 8.7 percent recorded in December 2008.

— *Julie Lynem*