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Catawba County's latest employment statistics paint a more positive picture for those hoping for a job in the area.

The number of employed workers in Catawba County increased by about 1,000 since the start of the year, according to statistics from the Employment Security Commission of North Carolina. In January, 63,046 people were employed in the county, and that number increased in September to 64,026.

"Very slowly, Catawba County is moving in the right direction," said Larry Parker, acting PIO director for the Employment Security Commission of North Carolina.

The county's unemployment rate decreased one percentage point from August to September, with the current unemployment rate at 11.3 percent.

Unemployment rates in 97 percent of North Carolina counties decreased in September, according to the latest statistics released by the state ESC. The unemployment rate statewide is 9.1 percent, which reflects a decrease from August's unemployment rate of 9.7 percent.

Although the trend represents a move in the right direction, North Carolina workers aren't out of the woods, yet. Less than half of the state's 100 counties have unemployment rates at or below North Carolina's rate.

"Economic challenges continue to impact communities across North Carolina," said ESC Chairwoman Lynn R. Holmes. "We still have more than a third of the state's counties with over 10 percent unemployment. Throughout our offices statewide, our staff continues to step up the effort to find work for job seekers and assist those who qualify for benefits."

North Carolinians and Catawba County residents could see employment opportunities continue to increase in the coming months. As the holidays approach, so do opportunities for seasonal employment.

"Certainly that's something we always hope for," Parker said. "The hard part is, we can't always guarantee if that's going to happen."

Stores usually hire workers for seasonal holiday positions, such as sales associates or stocking clerks, in October, Parker said. Those new hires could be reflected in the October unemployment rates, which are expected to be released Nov. 19.

Unemployment rates in the Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton metropolitan area decreased from 12.5 percent to 11.7 percent from August to September. The region, however, has one of the highest unemployment rates in metropolitan areas across the state.

Currituck County has the state's lowest unemployment rate at 4.1 percent. Scotland County, with 14.8 percent unemployment, has the state's highest rate.

North Carolina has a workforce of about 4.5 million people. Of those people, about 4 million are employed.

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Catawba County's employed workers increased by almost 1,000 from January to September.

Catawba County, N.C.

O-N-E Staff Writer

Observer News Enterprise

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