Business

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Jobless rate trickles lower

Numbers decline in part because many give up, experts say

Valley jobless rates improve

Riverside County and the Coachella Valley saw improvement in May unemployment numbers compared with April.

Bermuda Dunes: 6.1 percent, down from 6.3 percent in April
Cathedral City: 13.0 percent, down from 13.2 percent in April
Coachella: 20.7 percent, down from 21.1 percent in April
Desert Hot Springs: 18.6 percent, down from 18.9 percent in April
Indian Wells: 4.7 percent, down from 4.8 percent in April
Indio: 14.3 percent, down from 14.6 percent in April
La Quinta: 7.0 percent, down from 7.1 percent in April
Mecca: 25.9 percent, down from 26.3 percent in April
Palm Desert: 7.9 percent, down from 8.1 percent in April
Palm Springs: 10.3 percent, down from 10.6 percent in April
Rancho Mirage: 11.8 percent, down from 12.1 percent in April
Thousand Palms: 9.3 percent, down from 9.5 percent in April
Riverside County: 13.3 percent, down from 13.5 percent in April
California: 11.7 percent, down from revised 11.8 percent in April
U.S.: 9.1 percent, up from 9.0 percent in April

SOURCE: California Employment Development Department

BY MIKE PERRAULT
The Desert sun

Joblessness fell slightly across the Coachella Valley, Riverside County and California in May, but it's likely because the pace of job growth remained so slow that many unemployed simply chose to exit the workforce, economists said Friday.

Riverside County's unemployment rate fell to 13.3 percent in May from 13.5 percent the previous month, and down from 14 percent in May 2010, the state Employment Development Department reported Friday.

Riverside County's unemployment rate has fallen a full percentage point since January. The last time the county's jobless rate was in the single-digit integers was November 2008, when it was at 9.8 percent.

Coachella Valley cities and unincorporated areas' jobless rates in May ranged from a low of 4.7 percent in Indian Wells to a high of 25.9 percent in Mecca.

Of 118,000 jobless people in Riverside County last month, about 19,000 lived in the Coachella Valley.

Statewide, the jobless rate fell to 11.7 percent in May from a revised 11.8 percent in April. The national unemployment rate was 9.1 percent in May, up from 9 percent in April.

The Labor Department reported Friday that California is one of five states that continue to suffer from double-digit unemployment. The others are Florida, Michigan, Nevada and Rhode Island. Twenty-five states had jobless rates below the national average of 9.1 percent in May.

Esmael Adibi, a Chapman University economist who oversees The Desert Sun's quarterly economic index, said the inland region lost about 1,900 nonfarm jobs during May, and California lost 29,200.

"Probably, this is just a pause," Adibi said of statewide job losses and the economic slowdown.

"I think it's being caused mostly by the situation in Japan and gasoline

Please see JOBLESS, E3

LYNNE SLADKY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Flying away at the best price can be challenging, even frustrating as airfares can change from day to day and hour to hour, in some cases.

Good fare? Good luck

BY SAMANTHA BOMKAMP AND SCOTT MAYEROWITZ
AP Airlines Writers

NEW YORK — Searching for airfares often seems to be a game passengers are set up to lose.

Prices change from day to day, even minute to minute. Scouring multiple websites for the best deal can be overwhelming. And after you book, there's no guarantee that you got the best price.

"You just don't know when to pull the trigger. It's not like buying anything else I can think of," said George Hobica, founder of Airfarewatchdog.com.

Harriet Levy paid $179 for a recent round-trip flight on American Airlines between New York and Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Sitting just one row behind her, Shirley Harrison paid $215. A few rows back, Ellis and Dianne Traub paid $317 each. There were at least 12 fares on the flight, ranging from $169 to $360.

"There's no rhyme or reason to it," Harrison said.

Fares can fluctuate significantly in just a few hours. One Delta flight from New York to Los Angeles jumped from $755 to $1,143 from a Friday to Saturday in late April, then fell to $718 on Sunday.

The flight was one of a dozen The Associated Press tracked over three months for a July 16-22 vacation. The No. 1 finding: Avoid booking tickets on weekends. It's the most expensive time to buy.

There's no way to guarantee the best fare. But before booking, travelers should heed this additional advice:

■ Book on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. That's when airlines most often offer sales.

■ Buy in advance, but not too early. The best time is four to six weeks before traveling. In general, prices for any given flight are highest eight to 10 weeks and two to three weeks in advance.

■ Embrace social media. Airlines are giving more benefits, like exclusive sales, to travelers who interact with them on Twitter and Facebook. Those specials are often gone within hours.

■ The so-called discount airlines — JetBlue, AirTran, Southwest and Frontier — adjust their fares less frequently than other airlines, so you can feel more confident locking in a price. But their prices aren't always the lowest. Researching multiple airlines' fares is the only way to get a good deal.

It wasn't always this complicated. Before the airlines were deregulated in 1978, airfares were approved by the government. Prices were consistent and printed in timetables.

But it wasn't always this cheap, either. The average round-trip ticket in 1978 cost almost $600 in today's dollars, compared with $316 today. Because air travel was something of a luxury, planes were often less than half full.

Deregulation allowed airlines to set fares and routes on their own. In the early '80s, American Airlines started selling empty seats at a steep discount. The aim was to fill up planes and compete with new discount airlines such as PeoplExpress.

To prevent business travelers from trading down to cheaper tickets, the airlines required that fliers buy two to three weeks in advance and spend a Saturday night at their destination. The discount airline ticket was born.

Today, sophisticated computer programs analyze travel data and set a

Please see AIRLINES, E2

Agency poised for growth opportunities

Valley economic partnership puts pieces in place

BY DEBRA GRUSZECKI
The Desert Sun

It's a question that always comes up.

Just how many jobs has the Coachella Valley Economic Partnership created for the investment it's received?

CEO Tom Flavin told investors in his state-of-CVEP address Wednesday that the return on investment has largely been focused on putting bricks and mortar into place.

On its face, it might not look quantifiable.

"When you ask what have we done, a lot of it is to put a tourniquet on what is happening in California, and turn it around," CVEP board chairman Don Perry said Wednesday.

"I can tell you, the momentum shift here has been significant. The idea that the Coachella Valley can lead what could happen in California is not hyperbole."

CVEP will move aggressively going forward, Flavin said, noting a plan to build a "bottom-up" economic development model.

And projects that demonstrate new job gains are in sight.

The proposed Thermal Motorsports Park & Club, which CVEP wants to "fast-track," would anchor tourism and create 477 jobs, Flavin said.

Two solar energy projects with boots on the ground — the $4 billion Solar Trust of America renewable energy station project in Blythe and NextEra Energy — are expected to create some 1,200 construction jobs and more than 400 permanent jobs when fully operational.

Executives who flew in for Friday's groundbreaking ceremony of the Solar Trust project stayed in hotels in Indian Wells.

Over the course of the project, many jobs could fall to Coachella Valley workers: Roughly 140 students from a pool of College of the Desert-certified utility-scale solar installers, CVEP operation manager Wesley Ahlgren said.

Local construction workers are already on the job as the earth is being graded.

"What we're doing at the local level is getting ready to receive the pitch," said Rick Daniels, a former CVEP chief executive now serving Desert Hot Springs as its city manager. "Going forward, it is market, market, market."

Healthy optimism

Tom Kirk, director of the Coachella Valley Association of Governments, said he's not engaged in day-to-day details but has observed from afar and is impressed with Rabobank's $250,000 pledge to CVEP.

"There's a healthy amount of optimism," he said. "Can we say we landed 22,000 jobs in the past two years? No. But the organization seems well-equipped and poised to do great things in the future."

John Soulliere, a former top exec-

Please see AGENCY, E2

CORRECTIONS

We correct errors of fact promptly and courteously. If you have a correction or clarification, please contact Senior Editor for Business James Meier at (760) 778-4623 or at **james.meier@thedesertsun.com**

BUSINESSBRIEFS

riverside east zone

Solar project gets loan guarantee

NextEra Energy Resources' Genesis solar project, to be located in the Riverside East solar zone east of the Coachella Valley, has been approved for a $681.6 million loan guarantee from the Department Energy.

Energy Secretary Steven Chu announced the loan guarantee Tuesday, along with a $1.2 million guarantee for Abengoa Solar's Mojave Desert Solar project in San Bernardino County.

Both projects use concentrating solar thermal technology and are projected to create about 800 jobs each during construction.

The 250-megawatt Genesis project, located 25 miles west of Blythe, has not officially broken ground but pre-construction activities are under way, NextEra officials said recently.

The company will sell power from the project to Pacific Gas & Electric and has estimated the project will produce enough electricity for 48,000 homes.

— K KAUFMANN

palm desert

Rabobank tops in satisfying customers

Rabobank N.A. announced it ranked highest in customer satisfaction among retail banks in California based on a study by **J.D. Power and Associates**.

Rabobank scored 796, which was 54 points above the industry average of 742 in California, according to a news release.

The study gauges customer satisfaction with account activities and information, facility, fees, problem resolution and product offerings.

Keith Goff, Rabobank regional president, said it recently launched a person-to-person payment service called **ZashPay**, which enables customers to send and receive money online from friends, family and coworkers.

— MIKE PERRAULT

Internet addresses may go from .com to .everything

BY JOELLE TESSLER
AP Technology Writer

WASHINGTON — Coming soon to the Internet: website addresses that end in ".bank," ".Vegas" and ".Canon."

The organization that oversees the Internet address system is preparing to open the floodgates to a nearly limitless selection of new website suffixes, including ones in Arabic, Chinese and other scripts. That could usher in the most sweeping transformation of the Domain Name System since its creation in the 1980s.

More than 300 suffixes are available today, the bulk of them are country-code domains, such as ".uk" for the United Kingdom and ".de" for Germany.

Hundreds or even thousands more suffixes could be created, categorized by everything from industry to geography to ethnicity.

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers will meet Monday in Singapore (Sunday evening in the U.S.) to vote on its expansion plan for domain names. If ICANN approves the plan as expected, new domains could start appearing late next year.

The new system could bring innovative branding opportunities and allow all sorts of niche communities to thrive online.

But businesses worry that they'll have to grab their brand names before others do. New suffixes could also create confusion as consumers navigate a Web with unfamiliar labels.

It's also possible that the new names won't make much difference because many people these days rely on search engines and mobile applications to find what they are looking for online. Consumers don't type Web addresses into browsers nearly as much as they did 15 years ago when talk of a domain name expansion began.

Please see INTERNET, E2

Internet moves beyond .com

THE ACTION: The organization that oversees the Internet address system is expected to vote to allow a nearly limitless selection of new website suffixes.

THE EXECTATIONS: The expansion could produce hundreds or even thousands of new suffixes categorized by everything from industry to geography to ethnicity.

THE SIGNIFICANCE: The new system could bring innovative branding opportunities and allow all sorts of niche communities to thrive online. But businesses worry that they will have to spend a lot to grab their brand names before others do. New suffixes could also create confusion among consumers.

Cloud computing accessible from anywhere

BY KIM KOMANDO
Gannett

Lately, we've been hearing a lot about cloud computing. Amazon's and Apple's recently announced cloud computing services have generated a lot of buzz.

But if you don't understand why cloud computing is the future of computers, you're not alone.

The "cloud" simply refers to the Internet. "Cloud computing" refers to software and services that run over the Internet. Webmail like Gmail and Hotmail are considered cloud computing. So are online backup services like my national radio show's advertiser Carbonite.com.

You can access cloud computing services and data from virtually any Web connection. Let's take a look at Amazon's and Apple's cloud services and the advantages they offer. Find links to apps and programs mentioned at Komando.com/news.

Amazon

Amazon Cloud Drive provides 5 gigabytes of free storage. That holds about 1,000 songs, 2,000 photos or 20 minutes of high-definition video. There is a 2 GB size limit per file. You can upload documents, videos, music, photos and more.

You get unlimited access to your files from up to eight devices. Amazon will upgrade your account to 20 GB for a year at no charge. You just have to buy an MP3 album. If you need more storage, Amazon offers paid plans. They start at 20 GB and top out at 1,000 GB (1 terabyte). You'll pay $1 per gigabyte per year. Plans renew automatically.

There are different ways to upload and download files. You can store MP3s purchased from Amazon on Cloud Drive automatically. Purchased music won't count against your storage limit. You can upload or download single files via your Web browser. To download multiple MP3s, you'll need the Amazon MP3 downloader. It runs on Windows XP, Vista and 7 and OS X.

Clicking a music file from your account will open the Amazon Cloud Player. You can listen to your music directly from the Web. You can only play MP3 files or AAC (M4A) files that are DRM-free. There's also a Cloud Player app for Android phones and tablets.

kim komando

Apple

iCloud is a free service that replaces MobileMe. It is integrated into apps and iTunes. Some iCloud features appear in iTunes 10.3 beta, but the full roll-out is this fall. iCloud provides 5 GB of free storage. You can also store up to 20,000 songs purchased from iTunes. Other purchased content and photos don't count against your limit.

When you purchase a song from iTunes, you can download it to any of your devices. Past purchases are available, and you can have music downloaded automatically. You can't play music directly from iCloud. You must download it.

You probably have music purchased from another store or ripped from CD. In that case, there's iTunes Match ($25 yearly). It scans your music collection. You can listen to music already in iTunes. If music isn't available, you can upload it from your collection.

iCloud isn't just about music, though. Photo Stream syncs photos taken on your iOS device with other devices. You can view and download photos to other iOS devices, PCs, Macs and Apple TVs. A Photo Stream album containing your last 1,000 photos is created. New photos are stored for 30 days.

iCloud also backs up a variety of other data, like apps, text messages and iWork documents. You get a free email address that works across all your devices. And it stores your calendar and contacts and syncs entries across all your devices. If you choose, you can create a calendar to share with your entire family.

To get all the features of iCloud, you'll need iOS 5 on your iPhone, iPad or iPod touch. Mac users need OS X Lion. It is available in July for $30. Windows users need Vista or Windows 7. Outlook 2007 or 2010 is recommended for accessing contacts and calendars.

As users, we are in the midst of a paradigm shift. No longer is our data, music, media, photos and documents tied to a particular computer at a specific location. When all this moves into the cloud, access to your files is literally at your fingertips.

Kim Komando hosts the nation's largest talk radio show about computers and the Internet. To subscribe to Kim's free email newsletters, sign up at: www.komando.com/newsletters. Contact her at C1Tech@gannett.com.

Panel extends deadline on cribs

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Consumer Product Safety Commission has voted to give rental companies more time to buy cribs that meet new safety standards.

The commission voted Friday to extend the deadline for short-term rental companies to buy the new cribs from June 28 of this year to Dec. 28, 2012.

The commission says in a statement that manufacturers and retailers will still be required to shift to the new designs by June 28.

AIRLINES

Continued from E1

range of ticket prices so airlines can get the most money out of each flight. Prices are generally higher for seats sold at the last minute, which are usually bought by business travelers. Refundable tickets tend to be the most expensive, and cheap fares come with lots of restrictions.

Other factors go into the price, too: How fast are tickets selling compared with previous years? Is there a conference or special event in the destination city? Fares are often adjusted to match other airlines' prices.

But there's still a great deal of human intervention.

"To a degree, it's trial and error," said Greg Aretakis, vice president of revenue production at Frontier Airlines.

There can be as many as 20 prices on any given flight. Airline executives say that all that helps them boost revenue by 3 percent to 6 percent. If they price tickets too low, the airline can lose money. If prices are too high, seats go unsold.

"If that seat goes out empty, we can't put it on the shelf and sell it the next day," said American Airlines spokesman Tim Smith. "A seat that goes unfilled is like a banana that instantly spoils on takeoff."

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Thunderbird Cove
Modern Italian villa. Remodeled in 2009. 4-bdrm suites, 4888 sf Sofacing Pool/spa. 3car garage. $1,475,000
Clancy Lane
Amazing southern mt & golf course views from this magical 2 story. 4bdrm suites 7000 sf 3car garage. $1,649,000
Cypress Heights
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Student, entrepreneur helps planning

BY DEBRA GRUSZECKI
The Desert Sun

From where Shawn Isaac sits, progress for an economic development agency such as CVEP isn't immediately quantifiable.

"It's so macro," the UC Irvine student from Rancho Mirage said.

"It's not as easy to measure as saying, 'Oh, CVEP gave this man a fish.' "

Isaac, 21, speaks from experience.

He is, as some sage executives might say, a California whiz kid.

Isaac

With two patents for a computer chip that Isaac and a business partner invented to make servers run eight times faster, this business economics major doesn't only own and run three companies off his personal laptop. He has rolled up the sleeves of his pin-striped shirt to intern at places such as the Coachella Valley Economic Partnership.

"I worked there last summer," he said.

He left toting business cards that gave him a fancy title: "Director of small business and entrepreneurship," the card read.

During his internship, he worked with CVEP staff to write a comprehensive economic development strategy that allows all valley cities to apply for grants. It earned him a "Get Close to John Legend" MySpace Music award. That scored a mention in several publications, including Forbes.

Besides the technology company, ALU Enterprises, Isaac also runs an entertainment booking business and a dot-com company offering students the chance to buy and sell textbooks on campuses.

Isaac's been pumped up about CVEP and his future ever since.

Unlike many who leave, and never return, the business major who juggles his virtual business on a four-year-old HP laptop hasn't discounted life here after graduation.

"Who knows, maybe someday I'll have a real company here with a real office."

AGENCY: Plans in place to assist growth

Continued from E1

utive with CVEP, said the blueprint is great in that it has given the organization explicit steps to take and a timeline to follow.

"But just because you have direction doesn't mean you set sail in the middle of the storm," he said.

"Quite frankly, the last couple years have probably not been the right moment because of the economic climate. There's been very little capital investment going on. But the fact that the organization was wise enough to get the plan solidified, funded and in place so they can pull the trigger when the development window pops open again is huge."

Criteria established

There is set criteria CVEP plans to meet for the fiscal year beginning July 1, Flavin said.

■ At the current funding level: 505 total jobs and 620 scholarship applications.

■ With $500,000 in new private investment: 1,515 total jobs and 740 scholarship applications.

The economic impact would be $82 million to $246 million, respectively.

"If you multiple the 17 applicants for solar projects, alone, that's a considerable impact on the economy and the tourism dollar," said Wes Ahlgren, operations director of CVEP.

One goal CVEP has set for the regional Innovation Hub it plans to oversee in the Rabobank Regional Business Center is to help six small, clean-tech companies.

"We hope to incubate and graduate 50 companies," Ahlgren said.

John Stiles, who was at the first meeting when the CVEP organization was hashed out, said the Pathways to Success program has been "phenomenal" and is likely doing more good than anyone can calibrate at this time.

"It has what I see as great potential to prepare employees for jobs."

Preparing an educated workforce is another mission.

Since the inception of the Workforce Excellence program, four investors have donated more than $8.6 million for a thriving economy.

Since 2009, $4.5 million worth of scholarship have been awarded from Desert Hot Springs and Sky Valley to spots as far away as Mecca and Salton City.

In the healthcare sector alone, the Coachella Valley has more than 1,000 students in health-related academies.

A total of 585 have been provided scholarships in 2009-2010 in industry clusters that include healthcare, clean technology and arts, media or entertainment.

Debra Gruszecki covers tourism, CVEP and Indian gaming for The Desert Sun. She can be reached at Debra.Gruszecki@thedesertsun.com or (760) 778-4643.

INTERNET: Name possibilities are endless

Continued from E1

"Most people don't pay a lot of attention to website addresses anyway these days," said Danny Sullivan, editor of Search Engine Land, a website that covers the search industry.

From a technical standpoint, domain names tell computers on the Internet where to find a website or send an email message. Without them, people would have to remember clunky numerals such as "165.1.59.220" for "ap.org."

The monikers have grown to mean much more, however. Amazon.com Inc. has built its brand on its website address, while bloggers take pride in running sites with their own domain names.

ICANN has already allowed two major expansions of the addressing system. In 2000, it approved seven new domains, including ".info" and ".biz." It began accepting new bids again in 2004. It has approved and added seven from that round, including ".xxx" for pornography sites this past March.

Under the expansion plan now before ICANN, future applications would be streamlined and open to all companies, organizations and individuals.

That has set off a virtual land rush.

Planning .Vegas

A group of entrepreneurs in Las Vegas is vying to operate a ".Vegas" suffix. They have the city's endorsement and consider ".Vegas" a way to unify local merchants, entertainment venues, residents and even businesses beyond Sin City.

Former professional hockey player Ron Andruff is working with international sports federations to bid for ".sport." He expects sports leagues, teams, athletes, equipment makers and fans to want websites with a suffix that defines them better.

Two groups — one backed by the Sierra Club and the other by the World Wildlife Federation — are separately seeking the right to operate a ".eco" suffix.

Big business will stake claims, too. Printer and camera maker Canon Inc. plans to apply for ".Canon". Trade groups for bankers and financial-services companies are working together to explore bids for ".bank", ".insure" and ".invest" for their member companies.

New domains offer fresh branding possibilities for companies to identify themselves online in "a more relevant or a more localized" way, said Pat Kane, a senior vice president at VeriSign Inc., which operates ".com" and ".net."

Although suffixes added over the past decade haven't been as popular as ".com," there has been demand for an expansion because nearly all of the most desirable ".com" addresses have been taken.

The thinking is that new businesses setting up shop online might prefer a simple name that ends in ".bank" rather than "TheBankDownTheStreetFromTheSupermarket.com."

The expansion plan before ICANN had been delayed, however, largely because of concerns that new suffixes could infringe on trademarks and copyrights. There's also worry that new suffixes could deceive consumers, create new platforms for hate groups or lead to website addresses ending in obscenities. ICANN spent years crafting guidelines and creating procedures for objecting to applications.

ICANN already has approved rules for some countries to claim suffixes that spell their names in languages other than English. The new plan opens that up to Chinese and Arabic versions of ".bank" and ".sport" as well.

It won't be cheap to operate a domain name suffix. The application fee is $185,000, and winners will have to pay $25,000 annually after that. Disputes are likely as different groups go after the same domain. ICANN may auction off domains if multiple parties have legitimate claims. Legal fees could also pile up as trademark owners and governments file objections to certain applications.

Trademark worries

Trademark holders, in particular, fear they would have to register a lot of addresses they don't need or want simply to keep others from using them. Microsoft Corp., for instance, would not want websites addresses such as "Microsoft.software" and "Microsoft.computer" used to commit fraud or sell pirated goods.

Copyright owners, too, worry they would have to devote more resources to fighting online piracy with a proliferation of websites ending in ".movies" and ".music" that distribute copyrighted content illegally.

Juan Diego Calle, whose company operates the existing ".co" suffix, said that with more alternatives available, more businesses and groups will see that they can set up shop online with a catchy, easy-to-remember website that doesn't end in ".com."

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