

# Unemployment plagues Asheville

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With the U.S. government's passage of a nearly \$900 billion economic stimulus package, Asheville residents question how and when the local economy will benefit from the proposed plan.

"Businesses and people are planning on weathering the up-and-down fluctuations of our current market," said Eileen Buecher, director of UNC Asheville's Career Center and career counselor of 20 years. "They're getting creative because everyone is just kind of waiting around to see what happens."

The Rankin Vault, a local bar and restaurant, features a buy-one-get-one-free on food "recession special" seven days a week, according to owner and manager Joel Hartzler.

The special runs between 3 and 7 p.m. and enables customers to buy one menu food item and receive a second of equal or lesser value for free.

Hartzler moved to Asheville in 2007 after owning and running two bars in Portland, Ore.

He and childhood friend Chad Smoker opened the bar in July and agree downtown businesses need to get creative in order to be successful in the current economic climate.

"It's hard to make money on food, whether you're running a special or not," Hartzler said. "We're hoping that offering people a great deal on a late lunch or early dinner will generate a boost in all of our sales."

Hartzler, along with many downtown restaurant owners, make up the third largest economic sector in Asheville.

Health services and private education, government (federal, state and local) and leisure and hospitality make up the three largest industry sectors for Asheville's economy, according to the Asheville Chamber of Commerce.

The Economic Development Coalition, as part of the Asheville Chamber, recently completed their second-quarter staff report for 2008-09, including a comprehensive local economy overview.

The mission of EDC is to help businesses succeed in Asheville, according to Senior Vice President Ben Teague.

"I am optimistic about Asheville's (economy)," Teague said. "Our current economic trend follows the rest of the nation, but I remain optimistic about the future, given our diverse economic position. Our economy has wide-ranging contributors, from manufacturing to health care to retail and tourism to professional

## Unemployment rates across the U.S.

### Highest unemployment rates

Michigan	9.6 percent
Rhode Island	9.3 percent
California	8.4 percent
South Carolina	8.4 percent
Oregon	8.1 percent
Washington, D.C.	8 percent
Nevada	8 percent

### Lowest unemployment rates

Wyoming	3.2 percent
North Dakota	3.3 percent
South Dakota	3.4 percent
Utah	3.7 percent
Nebraska	3.7 percent

The sector hit hardest is the professional and business services, according to Buecher.

"Typically, in a tough economy, the things that are cut first are marketing, consulting, telecommuter and things of that nature," Buecher said.

Buecher said the consistent influx of retirees to the Asheville community makes it difficult for recent graduates and young professionals to find employment in Asheville.

"Asheville is competitive, and it always has been competitive," Buecher said. "We have a very strong retiree community, and a lot of them are now looking for part-time work."

Buecher said there is no shortage of diverse individuals moving to Asheville on a yearly basis, and Teague says this can only benefit the local economy.

"Outside of our economic make-up, the core assets that brought us this far haven't changed," Teague said. "We still have the mountains, an innovative workforce and an entrepreneurial spirit. The chamber and the EDC are strategically poisoning ourselves to capitalize on opportunities now and in the future."

services."

Teague remains optimistic, but statistics show local unemployment rates following current national trends.

National unemployment increased by 125 percent from 2007 to 2008, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

In the city of Asheville, unemployment rates increased by more than 175 percent from 2007 to 2008.

Similarly, Buncombe County and N.C. unemployment spiked 175 percent from 2007 to 2008.

"The job market typically changes every three to five years," Buecher said. "The dips in employment were in 1983, 1992 and then now. A lot of what we are seeing is just the natural ebbs and flows of the market."

Of the 15 N.C. metropolitan statistical areas, the Asheville unemployment rate is the third lowest at 6.2 percent, behind Raleigh-Cary (6.1 percent) and Durham (5.8 percent), according to the EDC report.

However, the December job losses equaled 1,400, and the decline is the largest single-month drop on record.

## GIFT

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the GIFT program. She said her excellent experience last year taught her about managing kids and the issue of childhood obesity. Himelein made the program worthwhile, according to Kelly.

"She knows how to relate to people. She is really good at getting down to your level and making exercise seem fun and something you want to do," Kelly said.

James Cathers, 40, senior psychology student, says the GIFT class ranks high on his list of best classes.

"If you haven't gotten grass stains on your pant legs in a while, it feels so good to just play," he said. "And Dr. Himelein obviously loves doing this. You can just kind of see how she approaches the GIFT program itself."

Challenges arise with any program, and for Himelein, her most difficult moments, so far, include not enough time.

"It's really time consuming. I sometimes get worried that I am going to get too old," she said.

Himelein said her dream is working for a non-profit organization, training students while the organization deals with the complicated logistics.

As GIFT approaches its third anniversary from March 17 to May 5, Himelein assures herself every year gets better and better.

"It has been a really valuable teaching experience. Where else are you all wearing T-shirts together, screaming with your professor?" she asks, laughing. "It is wonderful for me as community service as well as for the course that I teach."

## Chartwells

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the barrier between the university and the dining services staff.

"We feel like the staff should be protected by university values just as students and faculty are protected by these values," he said.

Most visitors to the boycott table knew McMillan and were upset she was not working at the cafe any longer, according to Rhyne.

"The students want to trust Bernice as a person they have grown to love over the years," Ladd said. "There is more trust for Bernice than the administration from which students have often felt disconnected."