

# Jobless rate drops; labor market shrinks

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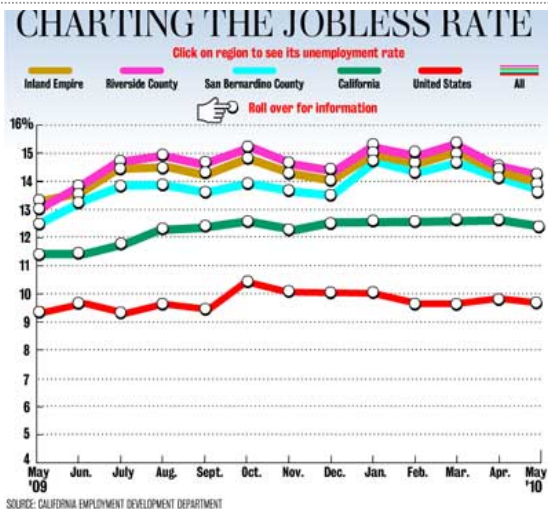
By KIMBERLY PIERCEALL  
The Press-Enterprise

The **unemployment** rate in Riverside and San Bernardino counties dropped to 13.9 percent in May from 14.2 the previous month, but the region still has a long, slow journey to recovery, economists said Friday.

"In 2010, every single day will be better than the day before," said Brad Kemp, with Los Angeles-based Beacon Economics. "We just won't be able to tell day to day."

The region lost 35,200 non-farm jobs between May 2009 and May 2010 and there were 20,700 more people receiving unemployment benefits, according to the latest figures from California's Employment Development Department.

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From December to May, though, the Inland region added 3,000 jobs, a sign of slow improvement, Kemp said.

"If your company is still around today, you've probably made it through the worst," Kemp said. But that doesn't mean companies will fire up their human resources departments and go on a hiring frenzy.

"Employers have learned to do more with less," he said.

Those who are working will likely keep working, he said. Those who are unemployed -- and there were at least 245,800 in the Inland region last month -- will still be seeking jobs for some time, he said.

The fact that the region is losing fewer and fewer jobs compared to last year is a positive sign, said Esmael Adibi, an economist with Chapman University.

Month to month, more people were employed and fewer were without jobs, according to the state's figures, which aren't seasonally adjusted.

There were 1,700 fewer Inland residents in the labor market than a year ago, though, and fewer people looking for work tends to drive down the jobless rate.