

# Saint John reports labour gains

APRIL CUNNINGHAM | Telegraph-Journal  
November 8, 2013

SAINT JOHN – Continued improvement in the Saint John region’s unemployment rate is highlighting the strength of urban centres in providing jobs, says a University of New Brunswick professor.

The jobless rate fell slightly to 9.4 per cent in the Saint John area last month, Statistics Canada numbers revealed Friday.

That compares to an unemployment rate of 9.7 per cent in September, when the jobless rate dipped below 10 per cent for the first time since April.

“Saint John seems to be leading the province. It seems to buck the provincial trend,” said Yves Bourgeois, of an urban studies institute at UNB Saint John.

Provincially, the unemployment rate dipped to 10.1 per cent, from 10.7 per cent in September. But Bourgeois said the decline is misleading, because it’s mainly attributed to the fact people stopped looking for work.

In the past month, 400 new jobs were added to the work force in the Saint John area, according to the latest labour force statistics. But there are actually 500 fewer jobs compared to a year ago.

In Moncton, the employment rate climbed slightly to 8 per cent, compared to 7.9 per cent the previous month. The number of jobs grew slightly.

“The fact that both cities are doing well when the province isn’t doing well in terms of shedding labour force is an encouraging sign and is probably reinforcing the growing belief that our cities are punching above their weight a bit,” Bourgeois said.

He said the Urban and Community Studies Institute is trying to understand and promote how rural communities benefit from strong urban centres “within ear shot.”

For people within commuting distance, “at least half the workers work in urban areas,” Bourgeois said. “It’s a kind of urbanization we’re seeing in New Brunswick.”

Nationally, the unemployment rate was unchanged at 6.9 per cent.

The latest statistics come as a Saint John call centre announced this week that it could close, eliminating 200 jobs. Iron Mountain said it would close its Saint John call centre gradually over the next year.

Eric Poirier, the chairman of the Saint John Board of Trade, said the gradually improving unemployment rate was like a “bud of good news” and a sign that local initiatives have traction.

But he added it’s not a time to “take the foot off the gas.”

“The plans and strategies we’re working on with True Growth 2.0, and focusing in on various sectors within the city that are growth opportunities for us and our economy, we need to continue,” he said.

“We need a good plan, stick to it, deliver and keep the momentum going as well as we can.”

Poirier said it’s possible that recent job growth could have been spurred by such announcements as Mariner Partners saying they would hire 60 new technology workers over the next three years. He said that could “organically” lead to optimism in the economy and business confidence.

“We’ve got to stay on the course,” he said, adding the need to continue with long-term solutions to job growth. “We’ve got to get to that steady decline in the unemployment rate.”