

Staffing 'all over the map' during COVID-19

Story by Emily Lindblom

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Staffing and turnover rates are all over the map during COVID-19, according to David Reid, executive director of the Astoria Warrenton Area Chamber of Commerce.

"For some businesses it's hard to get people to work at all even though unemployment is high, and for others it's hard to get people to stay," Reid said. "It's counter to what normal unemployment looks like."

Usually during periods of high unemployment, employees tend to hold onto the jobs they have and businesses don't need to offer high incentives.

"It's on its head this time," Reid said.

One factor that could play into this trend is the low inventory of workforce housing in the area.

"We already have that pressure on our housing and people can't find employees because of it, and there's the additional pressure of people moving here who don't need a local job," Reid said.

Shawna Sykes, workforce analyst with the Oregon Employment Department, said before COVID-19, the labor market was tight, unemployment was low, employers were having difficulty hiring and many were offering hiring incentives.

But as COVID hit, the number of job vacancies in Northwest Oregon dipped by 25% from the winter quarter to the spring quarter, according to the Employment Department's quarterly job vacancy survey.

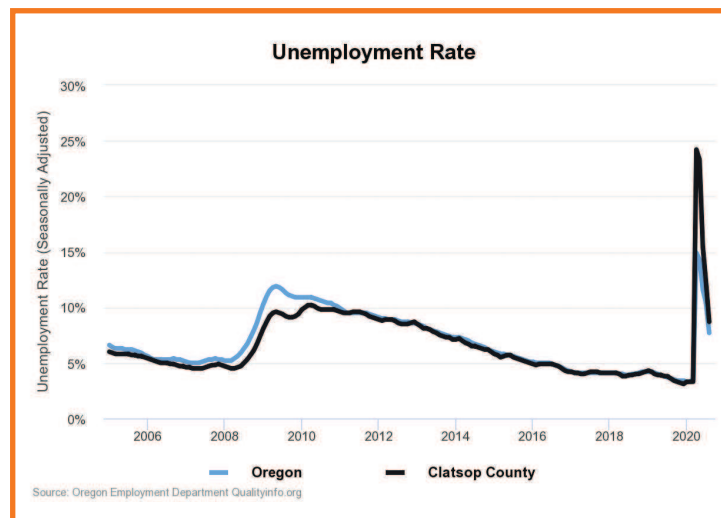
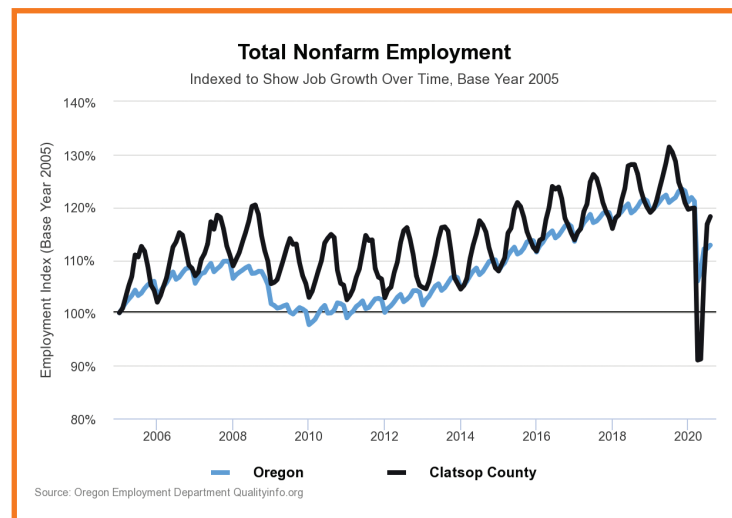
"Though unemployment is much higher now, some families have members who are at high risk for COVID-19, can't work outside the home, or don't have the option to work from home," Sykes said. "There is a lot of uncertainty about the future."

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She added that many parents are struggling with daycare needs and overseeing their kids' remote school work, while many employers have scaled back their hours or remain closed due to virus-related restrictions.

According to a recent forecast by the Oregon Office of Economic Analysis, the state may not regain its pre-pandemic economic state for about three years.

"I think until this pandemic is behind us, there will be instability within the labor market," Sykes said.



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