

NM Economy Lags National Trends

By Matt Robinson For the Sun-News

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DEMING — Personal income and per-capita personal income is on the rise, according to a "State of Working New Mexico" study released by New Mexico Voices for Children, founded in 1987 by a group of pediatricians. Despite the rise of personal income, the study details low employment rates and a lack of higher-wage industries compared to the national average.

According to the study, which draws data from the 2006 census and other government agencies, median state wages are at \$14.55 an hour, compared to \$15.10 an hour nationwide. New Mexican median household income rose — in inflation-adjusted dollars — from \$40,362 in 2002 to \$42,760 in 2007. Per capita personal income — not adjusted — is at \$31,474, compared to a national average of \$38,611. The average family income in Luna County is \$31,700.

Tommy Salas Jr., an employee at Border Foods in Deming feels the military is a way toward education and higher-paying jobs.

"They take people to college all the time," said Salas Jr. on higher education. "If people want to learn, they'll keep on learning."

Farm employment in the state is at 2.32 percent of the total 1,099,041 New Mexicans employed by industry. Private employment is at 77 percent and government employment is at 20 percent of total employment. Retail tops private employment rates at 11 percent. According to the study, New Mexico has a higher percentage of lower-wage industries than the nation. For example, those in information-related industries make up .38 percent of New Mexico's workforce, compared to two percent nationwide.

Silver City resident Sharon Domosley, a registered nurse, believes that graduates of Western New Mexico University are not sticking around her town to benefit the local economy, which is hurting her home of six years.

"There are not enough amenities," she said. "People who have education and more money naturally want more."

Domosley cites Wytheville, Virginia, as an example of a small town — less than 10,000 people live there — with enough restaurants, shops and commerce to keep residents around. "Amazing what they've got there," she said.

Deming resident, Bonnie Arrington, believes there is not enough being done to bring in more jobs. She blames local government.

"They fought Wal-Mart and look how many people they employ," she said. "Deming has never encouraged industry."

She later added: "What will it take in Deming? I don't know."

For employment, New Mexico has 61 percent of its residents employed, compared to the national average of 63 percent. New Mexico ranks 42nd in the nation for employment rates. Luna County has the lowest rate of employment at 38.9 percent with Grant County at 47.9 percent and 52.8 in Doña Ana. The rate is the percentage of the population over 16 years of age that is employed, including retirees. The total unemployment rate is 3.7 percent.

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