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Ark.'s average weekly wage below national average

LITTLE ROCK, ARK.

The average weekly wage of residents in Arkansas' 75 counties increased, but remained below the national average during the latter part of 2010, data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics shows.

The average weekly wage in Arkansas was \$738 in the final three months of last year, up 1.8 percent from the fourth quarter of 2009.

Arkansas' average is 47th in the nation, which had an average of \$971 for that period, the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette reported.

The highest average weekly wage was \$885 in Calhoun County, home of East Camden's Highland Industrial Park where defense contractors such as Lockheed Martin, Airjet General, General Dynamics and Raytheon Missile Systems are located.

Pulaski County was second with an average weekly wage of \$872, and Little River County, home to a Domtar Corp. paper mill, was third with an average weekly wage of \$860.

Six counties had average weekly wages of \$800 to \$885, seven had average wages of \$700-\$799, 28 had wages averaging \$600-\$699, 26 had average wages of \$500-\$599 and eight had wages below \$500.

The lowest average weekly wage was \$436 in Newton County.

"Our high-wage counties tend to be in the biggest metropolitan areas," Kathy Deck, director of the Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, said. "They also tend to have populations with the highest degree of education in the state."

Arkansas' low wages weren't surprising since its personal income ranks 46th in the country, said Michael Pakko, chief economist at the Institute for Economic Advancement at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

"Arkansas is known to be a low-income state and a low cost-of-living state," Pakko said.

Arkansas' cost of living ranks among the 10 lowest in the country, Pakko said.

Even so, a low-cost-of-living ranking doesn't help Arkansans in some areas, Deck said.

"Cost of living definitely matters when you look at housing and other areas," Deck said. "But we compete in a global economy and cost of living doesn't help in some areas, like gasoline prices."

The fastest growth in employment last year was 7.6 percent in Miller County compared with 2009.

Ten of the 15 counties with employment growth exceeding 2.25 percent were in the northern half of the state, statistics showed. The biggest decline last year was 10.3 percent in Little River County.

Information from: Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, <http://www.arkansasonline.com>