



UA Economist Encouraged by Job Growth

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Anyone who's attended the quarterly business analysis breakfasts hosted by the University of Arkansas' Sam M. Walton College of Business likely has heard Kathy Deck stress the importance of job growth as a critical factor in the health of the local economy.

Deck, the director of the UA's Center for Business and Economic Research, did so again Friday morning at the Reynolds Center.

"That's always the story," Deck said of job growth. "This time, it's a fantastic story."

Year-over-year gains in seven of 10 sectors were among the highlights presented during Deck's roughly hour-long program. First-quarter gains, in particular, Deck added, have been boosted by favorable winter and spring weather conditions and the slow, steady national recovery.

"Will we be able to keep those jobs and continue to add those kinds of jobs going forward?" Deck said. "That will be the key."

The leisure and hospitality sector saw the biggest year-over-year jump - about 7 percent - thanks largely to the opening of the Crystal Bridges museum in Bentonville. Deck said first-year projections of 250,000 visitors already have been met, and revisions now put that number at 600,000.

The professional and business services and trade, transportation and utilities sectors also enjoyed growth - of more than 6 and 3 percent, respectively.

"Those are our bread and butter industries, so that's encouraging," Deck said. "If the national economy keeps going like it is, Northwest Arkansas is poised to take advantage of that."

"Job growth in Northwest Arkansas will bring people here."

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