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January Jobless Rate Jumps

By [Kim Souza](#)

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The local unemployment rate rose to 6.8 percent in January, up from 5.8 percent a year ago, as some businesses scaled down payrolls and others closed their doors, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

For every 1,000 people in the regional work force, 68 were looking for work in January, including Michael Mollitor of Rogers. He was laid off from a retail job in the vendor community Nov. 6.

Mollitor, armed with nine years of retailing experience from grocery to hardlines and software data analysis, found the local job search daunting. He sent out more than 200 resumes and received only four interviews in a four-month span.

Mollitor said he used his networking skills to stay in touch with as many people as possible during his job search. The networking paid off when one of those contacts told him of an opening at Shopper Events in Rogers.

“I rushed them a resume and got a quick interview,” he said.

He accepted a position with Shopper Events a few weeks ago and considers himself fortunate to find work with somewhat comparable compensation in a very tight job market.

Some 250 local jobs were lost in December alone with the closing of T.G.I. Fridays, El Chico, Bob Maloney Ford and Northwest Arkansas Truck.

The regional job market is expected to tighten further when the 300 jobs eliminated by Walmart in February begin to show in the statistics. The jobless numbers cover Benton, Madison and Washington counties in Arkansas and McDonald County in Missouri.

The Walmart losses won't show until all severance has been paid out and the displaced workers apply for unemployment benefits, said Kathy Deck, director for the Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Arkansas.

There were roughly 196,800 nonfarm jobs reported in the local labor force in January, down 1.3 percent from a year ago. Some 1,265 people dropped off the work force rolls and another 2,082 became unemployed in the year-over-year period, Deck said.

Art Sherman of Lowell has been out of work for several months and decided to take his job request to the street, literally.

“Need work 479-721-2323” are written in large red letters on the back window of Sherman’s faded red Nissan pickup. He added “Have CDL” in white letters to the tailgate. Sherman, a former truck driver, said he has not been able to return to long haul driving since recovering from a heart attack last year.

“I put the message on the truck about a week ago and already bid two jobs,” he said. “I just want to work. I can do all sorts of odd jobs — really just about anything.”

Deck expects the local unemployment rate will recede to 5.8 percent by March and move lower toward the end of the year. The national unemployment rate in January was 10.6 percent, not seasonally adjusted, Deck said.