

HOW WE SEE IT

Don't Give Up On Economy, Graduates

Congratulations to all of Northwest Arkansas' college and high school graduates. Some graduates will extend their education and seek another degree at a higher level. Some have jobs lined up. For other grads, "commencement" means the beginning of a job search — one that might take a while.

We urge those in the latter category not to get discouraged.

A few months ago, the finance and business publication Kiplinger offered on its website some evidence that the economy was on the upswing.

For one rather interesting example, according to Kiplinger, sales of boxers and briefs have leveled off after suffering a 2.5 percent dip during the dark days of 2009. Men apparently are willing to hang onto their old underwear even longer when times get tough.

Kiplinger also pointed out that coffee giant Starbucks' net sales increased by 9.5 percent in 2010 after falling 6 percent in 2009 — a sign that people are willing to splurge again on their caffeine fix. Golf courses are seeing business pick up. And the number of people choosing to undergo cosmetic surgery rose by more than 13 million from 2009 to 2010.

This, then, is our gift to the class of 2011: a ray of hope. Confidence in the economy is rising.

It's not all good news. The national unemployment rate remains stubbornly high at 9 percent. Arkansas is at 7.7 percent.

Around here, however, the news is better. Kathy Deck, director of the Sam M. Walton College of Business' Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, said recently that the unemployment rates in Benton and Washington counties have stabilized at about 6 percent. Nonfarm employment growth in these two counties has been about 2 percent this year, double the rate of the rest of the country.

Getting more people through college will help this area and our state. We're pleased to see the number of people graduating this month from NorthWest Arkansas Community College (more than 900) and from the University of Arkansas (more than 4,000). Both of these totals were school records.

Good luck, graduates, on your future pursuits. Your diplomas are proof you can accomplish something when you put your mind to it. We hope you find a way to stick around this area and apply what you have learned — inside and outside the classroom — to make Northwest Arkansas a better place.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

The economic forecast, while not all rainbows and sunshine, is not entirely gloomy for recent graduates.