

Jobs coming back, growth rate should rise through '07

Colin Pope
Austin Business Journal staff

Austin is in store for some healthy and long-awaited job growth in the coming years if the slew of projections coming out hold true.

Disproving the theory that economists can't agree on anything, they all say the same thing about job growth in Austin: It's all uphill from here. In the context of job growth, uphill is good.

After adding jobs at a mind-blowing rate of more than 5.8 percent in 2000, the number of jobs in Austin decreased in 2002 and 2003. The area was set to finish 2004 with a modest gain of 0.53 percent, and an unemployment rate of about 4 percent.

But job growth in 2005 won't be as modest, economists say.

"I'm putting job growth for the Austin area in 2005 at 1.7 percent," says economist Jon Hockenyo, managing director of Austin-based Texas Perspectives Inc. "That's not bad. It's relatively good. Of course, it's nothing compared to what we saw in the late 1990s."

Upticks in job growth aren't expected to end after 2005. In fact, that's just the start of it.

The Austin metropolitan area is predicted to add jobs at the second-fastest pace in the country during the next five years, according to a recent study by Boston-based Torto Wheaton Research. Meanwhile, another research firm, Economy.com, predicts Austin will add jobs at more than double the national rate in coming years.

The biggest years for job growth, many predict, will be 2006 and 2007.

Take Samsung Austin Semiconductor LLP, for example. Samsung, which makes memory chips, is investing \$500 million to expand its Austin plant to meet growing demand. The expansion will create about 300 well-paying jobs for skilled workers such as engineers, spokesman Bill Cryer says. The company already employs about 930 people in Austin.

Aside from the tech sector, which industries are predicted to grow in Austin during the foreseeable future? The short answer: all of them.

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