

Jobs up, average hours dip

By Tim Krohn

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MANKATO — The area added 243 jobs in March, a 0.5 percent gain over February and up 1.1 percent during the past 12 months.

“ There were 581 more jobs than the previous year,” said Jonathan Zierdt, president and CEO of Greater Mankato Growth.

“ This is the seventh straight month that greater Mankato has seen yearover- year job increases, and we see that positive trend continuing.”

While job numbers grew, the average number of hours employees are working is down to 32.7 hours per week. It was 33.5 hours in February and 34.5 a year ago.

Average hourly earnings were \$23.40 in March, down slightly from February but ahead of the \$22.92 a year earlier.

There were 51,862 nonfarm jobs in the Mankato-North Mankato Metropolitan Statistical Area, which includes all of Blue Earth and Nicollet counties.

The region added jobs in all sectors — private, goods producing, service providing and government — in March compared to February.

The only area that lost jobs year over year was government, down 1 percent.

In March, the private sector provided 42,412 jobs in

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the area while government accounted for 9,450 jobs.

In the past 12 months, the Mankato area's job gains of 1.1 percent was second only to St. Cloud's 2 percent gain. Minneapolis-St. Paul was up 0.8 percent, Rochester up 0.5 percent and Duluth-Superior up 0.1 percent the past 12 months.

The state gained 2,800 jobs during the month, pushing the state unemployment rate down 0.1 percent to 6.6 percent, according to figures released Thursday by the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development.

The U.S. unemployment rate was 8.8 percent.

Local unemployment rates will be released next week.

The number of jobs in the state has grown by 0.8 percent during the past year, compared with a U.S. growth rate of 1 percent during that period.

“ The March figures reflect a continuing pattern of slow but steady progress in the Minnesota labor market,” DEED Commissioner Mark Phillips said in a statement. “ Through the first three months of the year, we’ve gained 7,300 jobs.”

Leisure and hospitality led all sectors in the state during the month. Other job gains occurred in education, health services, construction, manufacturing, transportation and utilities.

Job losses occurred in professional and business services, financial activities, government and information.