

The Sarasota-Manatee region added 5,200 jobs in the 12-month period ended in August.



In this photo taken in April 2015, construction cranes are seen at the Vue condominium and Westin hotel site at U.S. 41 and Gulf Stream in downtown Sarasota. H T ARCHIVE / MIKE LANG / 2015

By **John Hielscher**
Staff Writer

Wednesday

Posted Oct 19, 2016 at 8:40 PM

Updated Oct 19, 2016 at 8:40 PM

Florida as a whole is outpacing the rest of the nation in job growth.

LAKWOOD RANCH — At All Stat Home Health, management shows its appreciation to employees with a periodic "car day," where their vehicles are inspected, tires get filled with air, oil is added and windshield wiper fluid is topped off.

"It costs maybe \$100 for a full day," said administrator Carmen Scoma. "They talk about that for months. They try to tip us." It's a creative way to retain employees, he said, and a lot cheaper than the estimated \$3,300 cost per employee turnover.

"People who feel like they belong to a place are much less likely to leave," Scoma said.

Businesses throughout Southwest Florida - from manufacturers to construction to health care - are having trouble finding and keeping workers these days, according to employers who spoke Wednesday at the fifth annual CareerEdge "Jobs, Jobs, Jobs" event.

"We're short in just about every category you can think of," said Rod Hershberger, chairman/CEO of PGT Industries, the fast-growing maker of storm-resistant doors and windows in Venice.

"We're short in just about every category you can think of," said Rod Hershberger, chairman/CEO of PGT Industries, the fast-growing maker of storm-resistant doors and windows in Venice.

But it's not just finding workers with the required education or skills for the job, he said. "What's really difficult is finding people who have the soft skills," Hershberger said. "When you get an employee who's qualified to do the job, and they come in an hour late because their family was in town last night, and you should understand that."

A number of residential construction workers left Florida during the Great Recession and didn't return when the economy rebounded, said Cammie Longenecker, vice president of operations at Taylor Morrison. Some found construction work in other states, and others moved on to other careers.

"In commercial construction, the good news is we're back to life. You can see cranes in Sarasota and things being built," added Mary Slapp, executive director of the Gulf Coast Builders Exchange. "But workforce is our biggest problems right now. There are big opportunities in the trades, and finding those skilled to fill those gaps is becoming increasingly more difficult."

The Sarasota-Manatee region added 5,200 jobs in the 12-month period ended in August, the ninth best rate of job growth in the state's 22 metro areas, said Jerry Parrish, chief economist with the Florida Chamber of Commerce Foundation. Construction jobs grew by the highest percentage here, but in actual numbers the fastest-growing sectors were business and professional services, health care, hospitality and trade-transportation-utilities.

Florida as a whole is outpacing the rest of the nation in job growth.

"Florida has been creating one of every 10 jobs since early 2014," Parrish said. "We were producing jobs that double the rate of the average state."

The Sarasota-Manatee region will need to add 9,500 new jobs by 2020 and 28,057 by 2030 to maintain its economy, Parrish said.

The region will see its best job growth opportunities in the manufacturing and technical services sectors, said Chris Benner, professor of environmental studies and sociology at the University of California-Santa Cruz.

Health care will offer solid employment increases as well, especially at hospitals and home health companies, he said. So will construction, although that will likely be more cyclical.

Transportation-warehousing and financial services should be a lower priority for job growth. Employment in the financial sector has actually declined, he added.

CareerEdge is a partnership of business, government and philanthropic organizations that uses public and private funding to provide opportunities for better jobs and wages in Manatee, Sarasota and Charlotte counties.