

LI JOBS GROWTH SLOWS

'Strong overall' labor market, but retail takes a hit

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Long Island's job growth slowed last month, in part because of the shutdown of the Toys R Us chain, according to state data and a local economist.

The Island had 10,000 more jobs in September than in September 2017, preliminary state Labor Department data released Thursday show. That growth rate declined from a revised 15,800 year-over-year increase in August.

The biggest gains were in construction, and in private-education and health services.

The total number of jobs on Long Island rose to 1.356 million in September, from 1.346 million in September 2017.

"The labor market remains strong overall and job opportunities are favorable," said John A. Rizzo, economics professor at Stony Brook University and chief economist of the Long Island Association trade group.

The Island's retail sector shed 1,400 jobs last month, compared with a year earlier. The sector lost 4,400 jobs between August and September, when the loss is typically 1,300 jobs, said Shital Patel, labor-market analyst in the labor department's Hicksville office.

The end of the Toys R Us chain accounted for "some of the weakness" in retail jobs here, Patel said.

A dozen Toys R Us and Babies R Us locations, some of which were combination stores, closed by this summer after the chain filed for bankruptcy last year. The chain didn't disclose the number of jobs lost.

Patel cautioned against drawing conclusions about the upcoming holiday season based on a single month of declines in retail employment.

"We would not read too much into this loss for the upcoming holiday season, as stores have only started ramping up their seasonal hiring," she said.

What's more, she said that



Signs of the times recently at a Toys R Us/Babies R Us location in Bay Shore. The chain's shutdown affected LI's jobs landscape.

Winners and losers

Long Island job sectors with the biggest year-over-year gains and losses in September

Construction	7,000
Education and health services	3,200
Leisure & hospitality	1,600
Financial activities	-2,100
Retail*	-1,400
Manufacturing	-1,300

*Retail is a subsector of trade, transportation and utilities

SOURCE: NEW YORK STATE LABOR DEPARTMENT

the strong job growth in the transportation and warehousing industry reflects that it is "gearing up for a strong online holiday shopping season."

The transportation and warehousing sector added 1,500 jobs year over year. Measured from August to September, it added 5,300 jobs, when a 3,600-job increase is typical, Patel said.

Overall, the construction sector had the biggest employment increase, adding 7,000 jobs. It has

led employment growth on Long Island every month since June. Local economists have cited a wide variety of projects as the reason, including multifamily and assisted-living residences and building activity at colleges and universities.

The private-education and health-services sector came in second with a 3,200-job increase, with all but 400 of the jobs gained in health care. After a couple of declines earlier this year,

the total health care job count — 227,700 in September — has returned to a record level.

"The health care industry continues to boom," Patel said. "Health care has been the steady performer as technological advances in patient care, especially cancer care, increasing emphasis on preventative care and greater health care needs for an aging population drive employment growth."

Regional health care systems are spending hundreds of millions of dollars to expand their cancer care services on the Island, Newsday reported this month.

The government sector lost jobs, primarily because of declines in federal employment on the Island. The government sector declined by 300 jobs, from a year earlier.

In September, Long Island had 15,700 federal jobs, down 500 from a year earlier and the lowest for any year since 1990, when the department adopted its current job-count methodology.

The downturn in federal employment here is part of a long-term trend nationwide brought on by austerity budgets passed during the administration of President Barack Obama, said

economist Gregory DeFreitas, who heads Hofstra University's labor studies program.

"It's a long-term trend, but it's been intensified by the anti-government politics since the recession and the whole austerity thing," he said.

Given the rise of lower-wage jobs, which dominated Long Island's recovery from the last recession, the continued loss of government jobs could be worrisome, he said.

"Given that they are much more likely to be unionized and offer decent pay and benefits, potentially it's a source of concern if this trend continues," he said.

The department uses year-over-year data because the local numbers aren't adjusted to reflect seasonal swings in employment.

The Island's 0.7 percent job growth in September was lower than the state's 1.1 percent and the nation's 1.7 percent in the same seasonally unadjusted period.

The department is expected to release the Island's September jobless rate on Tuesday. In August it fell to 3.8 percent from 4.6 percent in August 2017.