

Michigan May Finally Be Over Its Decade-Long Job Slump

By KATHY BARKS HOFFMAN
Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Michigan has regained more than 151,000 jobs since the number of working residents fell to a recessionary low in mid-2009, a steady climb that began under Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm and has continued under Republican Gov. Rick Snyder.

Still, even as the state has seen its unemployment rate drop from a peak of 14.2 percent in August 2009 to 9 percent in January, economists say Michigan still has a long way to go to recover the 857,000 jobs lost between the April 2000 employment peak — when the jobless rate was just 3.4 percent — and the trough the state hit two years ago. As of January, over 700,000 remained unrecovered.

Yet, the sense is growing that Michigan — finally — may be over the decade-long slump that Snyder says left residents divided and far too discouraged about the state's advantages and ability to recover. Michigan residents are giving both the Republican governor and Democratic President Barack Obama higher job approval ratings as the economic climate improves. But a sense of caution remains.

"We have been busy reinventing Michigan, breaking

some bad habits of the past and embracing new opportunities for our future," Snyder told German company officials during a weeklong trade trip that resulted in a German orchid grower announcing it would open a 30,000-square-foot facility in Kalamazoo.

"To those of you looking to expand your global presence or enter the North American market, Michigan is the place to be."

Rick Waclawek, director of the state's Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives, has followed the long slump and slow recovery.

"We've been able to increase our employment after 9 or 10 years where we were losing employment in Michigan," he said. "As far as job growth, we are one of the leaders in the nation, on a percentage basis."

He still sees areas of concern. The percentage of discouraged workers or those working only part-time when they want to work full-time averaged 18.3 percent in Michigan in 2011, according to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"There's still that nagging unemployment level, particularly the long-term unemployed," Waclawek said. "That's probably the thing we need to be focused on, to make sure that we develop some (train-

ing) opportunities, jobs for the long-term unemployed."

To help students and workers find out information about careers, educational and training opportunities and job openings, Snyder launched the Pure Michigan Talent Connect website in early December.

The site is intended to give employers and jobseekers a place to find each other and allow workers to assess their skills and connect with mentors and internships.

The governor wants lawmakers to approve self-employment assistance that would give benefits to unemployed workers who are setting up their own businesses rather than requiring them to pursue job opportunities in order to qualify.

Snyder also has proposed spending \$15 million starting Oct. 1 to provide job training for 15- to 29-year-olds and ex-offenders in cities with the most

crime to get the chronically unemployed back to work.

"Obviously, you can't fill every job, because there will always be openings," Snyder said when he unveiled his plan for "growing talent" late last year.

"But if you start saying, 'Can we cut that number in half?' that would drop the unemployment rate by a whole percentage point. And that's a lot of jobs and major improvement."

The biggest driver of Michigan's resurgence has been the auto industry. Ever since General Motors Co. and Chrysler Group emerged from managed bankruptcies in 2009, they've been on an upward swing, allowing the state in 2010 to add more manufacturing jobs than it lost for the first time since 1999. GM even won back the title of the world's No. 1 automaker from competitor Toyota Motor Co.,

after Toyota had to slow production last year after an earthquake and tsunami struck northern Japan.

The improvement has spread into other sectors, giving Michigan its lowest unemployment rate in more than three years.

"When manufacturing goes up . . . it puts more money back into the economy," Waclawek said.

Not every sector has grown. Local governments and school districts have shed thousands of jobs as tight tax revenues have led to layoffs. Michigan has been among states with the largest government job losses since June 2009.

And its jobless rate has dropped in part because jobless workers have become discouraged and either moved away, headed back to school or otherwise quit looking for work. Waclawek says it's almost impossible to track where those former workers have gone.

Still, the trend is hopeful. Michigan's January jobless rate was lower than 10 other states and the District of Columbia, coming in nearly 4 percentage points below nation-leading Nevada's rate of 12.7 percent and well below rates in California and North Carolina. It's slowly growing closer to the national rate of 8.3 percent, and has seen a decline of 5 percentage points since the end of the national recession in mid-2009.

University of Michigan economist George Fulton forecasts Michigan will add about 26,000 net jobs this year and 28,500 in 2013 before seeing greater growth of 46,800 jobs in 2014. That's slower than the net 63,500 jobs the state added in 2011, but Fulton said it's still reason for optimism.

"Now that the darkest days are in the books, much of today's news is positive," Fulton told state officials in January.

GM Says Its Chevy Express Van Outperforms Rival

DETROIT — In head-to-head testing, the 2012 Chevrolet Express 4500 outperforms the Ford E-450 — its direct competitor — in acceleration, hill performance and fuel economy, or so claims GM in an announcement.

AMCI Testing, an independent automotive research firm specializing in comparative vehicle evaluations, put the V8 Chevrolet 4500 and the V10 Ford E-450 head-to-head, powertrain-to-powertrain.

Performance tests took place at the El Toro test facility in Irvine, Calif., and on the Scripps Poway Parkway. Real-world fuel economy tests were performed on AMCI's city and highway test routes, consisting of city streets, boulevards and highways in Southern California.

The Chevrolet 4500 outperformed the Ford E-450 in every test conducted, GM says. To ensure accurate test results, both vehicles were loaded to 14,000 gross vehicle weight. Highlights from the head-to-head comparison, according to GM:

- 0-60 acceleration: Chevro-

let outpaced Ford by 1.92 seconds (15.58 vs. Ford's 17.5)

- Highway merging, 20-65 mph: Chevrolet beat Ford by approximately 257 feet (1,022 vs. Ford's 1,279)

- 50-65 mph highway passing, on a 7 percent grade: Chevrolet reached 65 mph in 2,300 feet, while Ford could not reach 65 mph on this grade

- Hill climb to terminal (maximum) speed, from 50 mph: Chevrolet beat Ford with a total difference of 6.5 mph (65.2 mph in 2,300 feet vs. Ford at 58.7 mph)

- With 9.2 mpg highway and 8.1 mpg city, the Chevrolet has 1.5 mpg better fuel economy on the highway than the Ford and 1 mpg better in the city, equating to more than \$10,000 in average fuel cost savings over a five-year period. The AMCI fuel economy testing was conducted over 5,365 miles.

"Commercial fleets know our vehicles meet their trade-specific needs, and help them to efficiently run their businesses," said Ed Peper, general manager, GM Fleet and

Commercial Operations.

"The next step is demonstrating the quality of our product to our future customers, and we found AMCI Testing to be the right avenue to accomplish that goal."

Each van was equipped with identical cargo bodies, adding enough weight to bring them to exactly 7 tons gross vehicle weight.

During the tests, the air conditioning system use was strictly synchronized between both vehicles, windows were closed, audio systems were on, and headlights were off, except as required at sunset, when usage was synchronized. No other accessories were operated during the test.

"Frankly, we were very surprised at the large gap in performance between these two trucks," said Guy Mangiamiele, AMCI director of Vehicle Testing.

"As the data clearly shows, the Ford E-450 simply had very little performance reserve at these weights compared to the Chevy 4500. And when you consider the Chevy's real-world



In a hill climb to terminal (maximum) speed, from 50 mph: the 2012 Chevrolet Express 4500 cutaway beat Ford with a total difference of 6.5 mph, according to AMCI independent testing.

fuel economy advantage in percentage terms, it has cost-of-ownership implications over the lifetime of the vehicle."

AMCI Testing subjected the vehicles to other thorough rigorous evaluations, including quarter-mile acceleration and 40-60 mph passing.

The Chevrolet beat the Ford in all tests, GM claims.

Auto Hall Hosts Debut of Poster For 'Eyes' Show

The original automotive art which will make up the poster and program cover for the 25th anniversary EyesOn Design Exhibition will be unveiled at the Automotive Hall of Fame in Dearborn on Tuesday, April 24, at 10 a.m.

Noted auto artist Tom Hale, who was commissioned to make this year's design, will make brief remarks following the unveiling.

Rendered in his distinctive style, this original painting showcases a classic 1941 Lincoln Continental in front of the Edsel & Eleanor Ford House in Grosse Pointe Shores, which is the site of the June 17 EyesOn car show.

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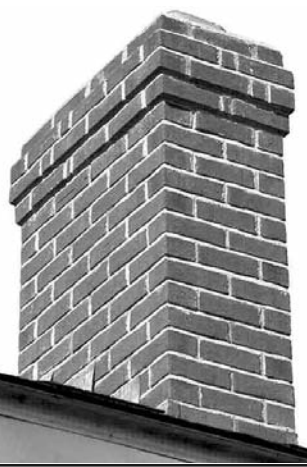
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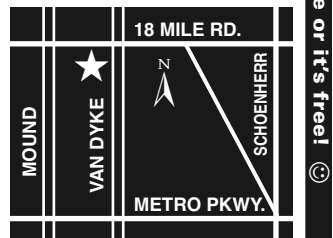
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