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JOB LOSSES

Construction job declines among 337 metro areas between October 2010 and October 2011.

1. Atlanta-Marletta	7,700
2. Tampa Bay	4,000
2. New York City	4,000
4. Philadelphia	3,600
4. Dallas	3,600

PERCENTAGE DECLINE

Biggest percentage declines in construction employment:

Metro Area	Drop
1. Logan, Utah	24%
2. Wilmington, N.C.	21%
3. Redding, Calif.	20%
4. Montgomery, Ala.	19%
5. Bridgeport-Stamford/Norwalk, Conn.	12%
5. Albuquerque, N.M.	12%
15. Tampa Bay	8%
97. North Port-Bradenton-Sarasota	3%

SOURCE: Associated General Contractors of America

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Builders still counting toll of jobs lost

Staff and Wire Reports

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Home construction has been showing signs of stabilizing, but that has not necessarily been true for the work force associated with the industry, one of Florida's key economic sectors.

The North Port-Bradenton-Sarasota metropolitan area saw a 3 percent drop in construction-related jobs -- to 14,600 -- in October when compared with a year ago, according to an analysis by the Associated General Contractors of America trade group.

That was actually good by Florida standards.

Miami posted only a 1 percent drop, but Lakeland logged a 4 percent decline; Fort Lauderdale, a 5 percent drop; and Cape Coral-Fort Myers, a 7 percent decline.

The nearby Tampa-St. Petersburg market shed 8 percent of its positions, or 4,000 positions, from October 2010 to October 2011, to 51,300 jobs. Only Palm Coast lost a larger percentage and among major markets only Atlanta a greater number of jobs at 7,700.

"For every two jobs we had in 2006, now there's one," said John Rymer, president of Rymer Strategies, a Tampa real estate advisory and research firm.

A lot of good people have had to be retrained, Rymer said. "They're not sitting there on the sidelines for five years, waiting for the economy to come back."

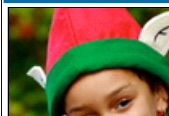
Rymer attributes the latest employment drop to the end of some large commercial projects and phased-out stimulus funding. Residential construction has stopped its freefall and is showing scattered signs of recovery, but Rymer predicts it will not truly start picking up before 2013.

The recent numbers have startled veterans of an industry that used to pride itself as Florida's chief growth engine.

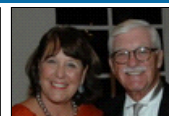
Jeff Thorson, division president of William Ryan Homes in Tampa, believes residential construction, at least, is bumping around a bottom, unlikely to get much worse.

Spotted from Herald-Tribune

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But shy of any major corporate relocations to the area, "I don't see any dramatic turnaround," he said.

This year, William Ryan is closing on about 100 home sales, and Thorson said the company is budgeting for roughly the same next year. At the height of the boom, it was closing 400 houses a year.

Meanwhile, other builders who had adjusted to the new building environment, such as Lakewood Ranch-based Neal Communities, are on track to post post-recession records.

Construction employment fell in 146 out of 337 metros during the past year, increased in 140 and stayed level in 51, according to the Associated General Contractors' analysis.

During the past year, construction employment has been flat nationally, hovering at 5.5 million jobs.

Florida has been adding jobs year over year in hospitality and tourism; health care; professional and business services; trade, transportation and utilities; financial activities; and even manufacturing.

Construction, along with government, is one of the few laggards.

"Our industry has historically led out of recessions in years past," said Thorson of William Ryan Homes. "This one, obviously, is a lot different."

Information from the St. Petersburg Times was used in this report.

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