Construction jobs boost employment

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An increase in construction jobs helped boost Baton Rouge area non-farm employment four percent to 231,200 in February from 222,300 the year before.

The area gained 3,000 construction jobs for a 12.9 percent increase to 26,300 in the 12-month period, according to preliminary February 1990 figures released Tuesday by the state Department of Labor. The four-parish area includes East and West Baton Rouge, Livingston and Ascension.

The rise in construction jobs resulted primarily from street and highway projects and expansions by the petrochemical industry, said labor department analyst Mary Hughes.

Construction growth is a good signal for the local economy because "ultimately, down the road, you know there are going to be permanent jobs from either a new plant or expansion," said Loren C. Scott, chairman of LSU's Department of Economics.

Local non-agricultural employment grew in every sector, except mining and finance/real estate/banking. Both sectors remained flat at 800 jobs and 13,100 jobs, respectively, the report said.

Manufacturing jobs grew 5.9 percent to 21,500 from 20,300 the year before, led by increases in durable goods, food and kindred products, and chemical and petroleum products.

Growth in manufacturing employment is key to stimulating growth in all other economic sectors, such as services, retail trade and real estate, Scott said.

Meanwhile, statewide employment rose 1.1 percent to 1.52 million jobs in February from the year before, the labor department reported.

The Baton Rouge area's rate of non-farm job growth was the highest among the state's eight major metropolitan areas during the 12 months ending in February.

Only Alexandria reported a decline in non-farm jobs of 0.7 percent to 44,900 during the 12-month period.

Without major manufacturing activity to boost its job rate, Alexandria's employment figures remain fairly constant, Scott said.

Job gains for other areas during the period were Monroe, 3.9 percent to 56,600; Houma-Thibodaux, 3.8 percent to 55,000; Lafayette, 3.1 percent to 87,500; Lake Charles, 3.1 percent to 62,700; Shreveport, 2.1 percent to 130,800; and New Orleans, 1.8 percent to 528,100.