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## Ariz. has top job-growth rate

**For last 12 months, employment in state increased by 4.73 percent**

**By Richard Ducote**

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Arizona job growth has been robust in recent years but outdid itself last month, ranking No. 1 in the nation for year-to-year improvement.

The state added 121,200 nonfarm payroll jobs from October 2005 through last month for a 12-month growth rate of 4.73 percent. That compares with projected population growth of 3.0 percent this year, according to the Western Blue Chip Economic Forecast by Arizona State University.

No. 2 on the jobs hit parade was Wyoming, adding 12,500 jobs for a growth rate of 4.68 percent. Utah, Nevada, Louisiana and Montana followed, each with job growth of more than 4 percent.

Arizona has generally ranked in the top five — often No. 2 or No. 3 — for job growth among states in recent years, but it has not topped the list since at least 2003.

In the 12 months that ended in October, only three much larger states — Florida, Texas and California — gained more jobs than Arizona did.

Strong population growth is a major driver of Arizona's tight job market, said Don Wehbey, research administration senior economist with the state Department of Economic Security. Businesses are recognizing this is a good place to come as well, he added.

Just last week, the DES reported that October saw a record number of jobs in the state — 2,684,200 — and that all but one major job sector, information, saw month-to-month employment gains.

The DES said the state's economy offered "plenty of job opportunities as Arizona businesses prepare for increased tourism and the holiday season."

Arizona's October unemployment rate of 3.9 percent indicates full employment in the view of many economists, Wehbey said. Metro Tucson had an identical 3.9 percent rate last month.

Finding qualified workers can be a challenge in the tight labor market, said Tami Ivy, marketing manager at Park Place mall. Anticipating a strong holiday season, Ivy said many merchants at the mall, on East Broadway near Wilmot Road, are still looking for holiday help. As of late Tuesday, the mall's Web site, [www.parkplacemall.com](http://www.parkplacemall.com), listed numerous positions for several Park Place merchants.

For some positions in customer service with the mall, Ivy said, "we've been recruiting since mid-October and didn't expect it to take as long as it did." Ivy said her management office filled its last job this week.

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