

Public safety officials encourage residents to create and update their information in the Nnew ACORNS platform

In May 2022 public safety officials in Anson County announced that ACORNS was now available to all residents, replacing the previous ACORN system. ACORNS is a free service that allows individuals to receive notifications sent from National Weather Service (NWS) and local authorities to stay informed on potentially hazardous situations involving weather, traffic and other emergencies, including the spread of the coronavirus. The switch to ACORNS allows residents to receive alerts via phone, text and email, and answer poll questions that will give Anson County officials critical information during emergency situations. Individuals who are signed up for alerts will receive reliable information from county officials, including tailored updates based on their specific needs and geographic location.

Individuals who were previously signed up for ACORN will need to enroll in ACORNS, and to review and update their information in the new platform to ensure accuracy. Residents and travelers to Anson County who were not previously signed up for ACORN should sign up for free at www.co.anson.nc.us to receive timely and actionable emergency alerts via email, text or voice message. They can also identify when and how they are alerted and communicated with before, during and after emergencies.

“ACORNS strengthens Anson County officials’ ability to communicate with residents when it matters most,” said R. Diggs, Chief, Anson County Emergency Services. “This service allows for critical communication with the public and provides individuals with the information needed to stay safe or take precautions during hazardous or emergency situations, especially during severe weather.”

ACORNS is powered by Rave and is trusted by thousands of institutions including state and local authorities, business and educational institutions. Rave sends millions of messages daily and during critical situations such as severe weather.

Community members are encouraged to sign up for ACORNS and input or update their information and notification preferences today at www.co.anson.nc.us.

You Decide: Is the Labor Market Returning to Normal?

By Mike Walden: After inflation, the labor market shortage has probably been the top story of the past two years. Many businesses have struggled to find workers, despite increasing starting pay. The number of open jobs outnumbers jobless individuals, and a large number of people who could be working haven’t taken a job. The latest national jobs report for January suggests some of these concerns may be improving. The number of non-farm jobs added at businesses exceeded half a million, almost double the December number and the highest since last February. The labor force participation rate, which measures the number of people working or looking for work as a percentage of those who could work, was at its highest since the pandemic.

Yet maybe the most interesting change is inside the aggregate numbers. After a surge in tech jobs between 2019 and mid-2022, many tech companies are cutting jobs as they worry about a possible recession. At the same time, however, industries that were having trouble finding workers – like restaurants and personal services – have had better success in recent months. For example, the hospitality and leisure sector, which includes restaurants, hotels and entertainment venues, added 44% more employees in January compared to their monthly average in 2022.

Some may read these recent results as meaning the job market is returning to what it was before COVID-19 hit. This may be a stretch. Although the number of job openings per unemployed person has edged down to 1.7 – from a high of over 2 – it is still much greater than the 1.2 jobs per jobless person before the pandemic.

Also, because the economy has enjoyed good growth in the last two years, the standard for employment shouldn’t necessarily be the numbers from early 2020. Between 2019 and 2022, economic growth exceeded employment growth by a significant margin in both the nation as well as in North Carolina. In short, employment has not kept up with economic output.

There are also long-term trends to recognize. It is common to hear that the labor force participation rate has improved, but it is still less than the rate before COVID-19. Many are expecting the rate to eventually reach earlier levels. It may not, however, because labor force participation in the country has been declining for several decades. Between 2001 and 2011, the labor force participation rate fell 2.7 percentage points. Between 2011 and 2021, it fell another 2.5 percentage points, and it’s expected to drop another 1.6 percentage points between 2021 and 2031.

There are several factors behind these reductions: an aging population, a jump in retirements, a declining birthrate, more young people spending additional time in school and delaying their entry into the workforce, and a rethinking of the work-life balance for many households. Hence, what has been happening in the labor force is not all related to COVID-19. The natural reallocation of jobs as the economy changes, and shifts in demographic and societal factors, significantly impact the workforce. Still, if we don’t have enough individuals to do the work needed in the economy, what are we going to do? There are many possible answers.

One is to improve worker productivity. This means getting more output from each worker. Usually this is accomplished by matching workers with technology or machinery that allows them to accomplish more in the same time period. Some industries are well suited to do this – manufacturing is a good candidate. Others aren’t. Productivity improvements in the construction industry have lagged behind most industries because there are often unique factors at sites preventing the use of mass-produced inputs. For example, walls for buildings can be mass-produced in factories and then shipped to construction sites. But concrete-poured foundations are often not perfectly level, and thereby are not a viable match for precisely leveled factory-built walls.

Another tactic is to expose young people to possible careers much earlier than their late teens or early 20s. A program in North Carolina is using specially equipped trucks containing virtual reality machines to give middle-school and high-school students “virtually real” exposure to trades like plumbing, welding, carpentry and brick-laying – all occupations in need of new workers. By using the machines, students sense they are actually performing the work, and many become very excited. Backers of the program hope it will motivate more students to pursue careers in construction.

Many companies are finding they must offer greater flexibility to workers in order to improve their success in hiring. Flexibility includes more options for remote work, greater sensitivity to needs of children and families, and training opportunities within the company that can improve promotion possibilities.

The conclusion is that the changes we are seeing in the labor market are not all due to the pandemic. Many would have eventually happened without the pandemic. They are part of our ever-changing economy.

It is ironic – at least to me – that today’s concern about a labor shortage is exactly the opposite of the prevailing concern less than a decade ago about a possible emerging labor surplus. This was at a time when labor-saving technology was beginning to emerge. There were worries the typical unemployment rate could hit 20%.

How times and concerns have changed in less than a decade, but one lesson of history is that change usually is the norm. So, can we really define a “normal” labor market? You decide.

Walden is a William Neal Reynolds Distinguished Professor Emeritus at North Carolina State University.

BBB Scam Alert: How Social Security Recipients Can Stay Alert to Cost of Living Adjustment Scams

Each year, the Social Security Administration (SSA) approves a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for recipients of Social Security benefits and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Due to inflation, payments can increase by 8.7% this year. It’s a significant increase – the highest COLA approved in more than 40 years – and scammers are taking advantage. If you or a loved one receive Social Security benefits, stay alert to the signs of a scam.

How the scam works Scammers contact you by phone, text or email. This “Social Security Administration representative” claims you must apply for your cost-of-living increase. They might ask you to visit a website, send information via text or email, or speak with them on the phone to get the benefit. The scammer will ask you to verify your identity by sharing personal details, such as your full name, address or Social Security number. They may even ask for your bank account information, claiming that the representative will deposit the extra money directly into your account.

In any case, if you give your information to the person in question, they will have gained access to your most sensitive personal information, making you susceptible to identity theft. If you give up your banking information, they may even be able to gain access to your money. **How to avoid Social Security scams**

- Remember, the SSA’s COLA is automatic. You don’t need to do anything to receive the increase in benefits. If someone tells you otherwise, you’re likely dealing with a scammer.

- Know how the SSA communicates. According to SSA, “If there is a problem with your Social Security number, we will mail you a letter. Generally, we will only contact you if you have requested a call or have ongoing business with us.” A call, text or email from an SSA agent out of the blue is a red flag.

- Don’t give in to threats. SSA will never threaten you with arrest or legal action. They will never suspend your Social Security number or demand payment from you. They will never ask for personal information or banking details to give you an increase in benefits. If someone demands these things or threatens you over the phone, they are not with SSA.

- When in doubt, hang up. If you suspect you might be getting scammed, stop all communications. Visit Medicare.gov to research or call 1-800-MEDICARE for information.

Church News

THE CHURCH CALENDAR IS BROUGHT TO YOU BY THESE SPONSORS

MARCH 3 BBQ Plate Sale

At Pleasant Hill AME Zion Church, 378 Pleasant Hill Church Rd (109 South) in Wadesboro, starting at 10am. Plates \$12 & bulk \$13. All are invited for a delicious barbecue meal!

MARCH 3 & 4 Plate Sale

At Lilesville Star Lodge #603 PHA, 11am-6pm. Flounder, croaker, chicken, bbq pork & ribs, sides. \$15. Delivery 704-695-4527.

MARCH 4 & 5 1st Appreciation Service

for Pastor Tobias Wall & Lady Janetta Wall at Saron Missionary Baptist Church. Sat-3pm & Pastor Wall Sun-11am.

MARCH 5 Family & Friends Day

At Victory Temple Miracle Center, 4pm with Rev. Christian Hall of Flakes Chapel.

MARCH 19 Pastor’s Appreciation Service

for Bishop James Glenn & Lady Glenn at Victory Temple Miracle Center, 4pm. Public is invited.

MARCH 26 Twelve Tribes Program

at Rock Hill Missionary Baptist Church, Hwy 74 in Lilesville, 3pm. All are invited.

ONGOING Weekly Bible Study

At Rock Hill Missionary Baptist Church, Wednesdays, 6pm will be on conference call until further notice. The conference call number is 1-701-802-5473. The code is 746875#. All are welcome

Time for You

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Events

MARCH 7

Board of Commissioners Meet 6pm in Board Room, Suite 209, in Government Center, 101 S Greene St in uptown Wadesboro. This is the regular monthly meeting.

Meeting available online at youtube.com, search for Anson Commissioners. To appear, sign up prior to meeting. Info 704-994-3201

ONGOING EVENTS

Direct and Counter Cyclical Program Sign-ups Call the Farm Service Agency Office at 704-694-3516 ext. 2 to complete eligibility forms

Senior Box Program at Feed My Lambs starts the third Tuesday each month for seniors only. Located at 2290 Hwy 74 West, Wadesboro. 704-695-1820

Food Pantry Free food every Wed, 9-11am at Burnsville Recreation & Learning Ctr. 704-826-8182

NAACP Meeting Third Sundays, Hampton B. Allen Library theater, 5pm, 704-694-6749

Monthly Meetings Uptown Wadesboro, Inc. meets the first Tuesday of every month at 4 pm in the Chamber of Commerce conference room. Info 704-695-1644

Wadesboro Rotary Club Meets each Thursday at noon for lunch at the Lockhart-Taylor Center, Studio A in Wadesboro

Shamrock Shuffle 5K & Shop Local Event

The Anson County Chamber of Commerce will host the Shamrock Shuffle 5K Run/Walk & Shop Local Event on Saturday, March 18 to celebrate St. Patrick’s Day. All Shamrock Shuffle 5K Run/Walk proceeds help support ongoing Chamber programs, activities and community events!

Want to be a vendor? Visit: form.jotform.com/ansonchamber/vendor-registration. All vendor applications have to be completed, signed, and fees paid no later than Wednesday, March 15. The Shamrock Shuffle Event Committee will review all applications as they are submitted. If approved, a confirmation and a link to submit payment will be emailed.

Wanting to participate in the 5K run/walk? Pre-registration fee is \$30 for adults, \$15 for all school age (K-12th) participants. Day of race registration is available; however, registration fees will increase to \$35 for adults, \$20 students (K-12th grade). No refunds will be given.

Register at: runsignup.com/Race/NC/Wadesboro/ShamrockShuffle5Kevent.

Registration fee includes a race t-shirt, and one FREE glass of beer to participants 21 years of age and older. Photo ID will be required on race day, NO EXCEPTIONS. T-Shirts guaranteed only if registered by March 3. Additional beer will be available for purchase (cash only) for \$5 per cup. There will be food trucks, vendors, local shops open, a cruise-in, and music in uptown Wadesboro. All activities will conclude at 5:00 p.m.

Contact Shelby Emrich, Chamber Director, for more information at 704-694-4181 or emrich@ansoncountychamber.org.

Anson Mobile Food Market is March 16

The Anson Mobile Food Market will be held on Thursday, March 16, starting at 10 a.m. at the Caraway Foundation, located at 9162 Highway 52 in Ansonville. Attendees can receive free food items. This is a free initiative, so please stop by and get some healthy food for your family. The event will include blood pressure and blood sugar checks, as well information on healthy eating and lifestyle.

This event is to assist in the scarcity of fresh, healthy food in the county.

Cheraw Arts Commission Offers Pottery Class

The Cheraw Arts Commission will offer a Pottery Class in March. The 2 part class will provide basic instruction in pottery handbuilding and glazing techniques. The first class will be on March 11 followed by the final class on March 25. Class time is 10:00am until 1:00pm and will be held at the Cheraw Community Center – 200 Powe Street.

Class instructor is ceramic artist Jane Crossman. Participants will learn basic handbuilding techniques such as pinching, coiling and slab built pottery at the initial class with glazing planned for the second class. Students will make a bowl or mug with textures and other decorative techniques. Additional items that will be created include ornaments and garden markers. Students (9th-12th) and Adults can participate in the class. All supplies are included in the \$75 fee.

Call the Cheraw Arts Commission for additional information and to register by March 3 (843.537.8420 x 12).

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