

September Unemployment: Mixed Bag

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Unemployment rates (not seasonally adjusted) decreased in 98 of North Carolina's counties in August, increased in one and remained the same in one. All fourteen of the State's metro areas experienced rate decreases. In the High Country, Ashe unemployment dropped a tenth of a percent to 9.7%, while Avery's dropped .4% to 8.6%. Watauga's unemployment rate .6% landing at 7.3%. The statistics are still unsettling, with those employed shrinking nearly 20,000, the rates down mostly due to the unemployment number falling over 44,000. Another disturbing factor is that jobs paying a living wage are on the rise, according to Tazra Mitchell of the NC Budget and Tax Center, "The bad news is that the majority of all job creation is occurring in industries that don't pay a living wage." She said a living wage in the state is defined as between \$10 and \$12 per hour, and that last year, in spite of fast growth in the leisure and hospitality sector—a big part of the High Country economy—the average wage is about \$8 an hour. Census data shows that, adjusted for inflation, North Carolinians are making less now than in 2000.