

## Palm Beach County Unemployment Rate Drops to Decade Low of 3.6 Percent

*West Palm Beach, Fla.* – Reports released today from CareerSource Palm Beach County and the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity show Palm Beach County’s unemployment rate for September 2017 dropped to the lowest level in a decade. The county’s 3.6 percent rate also dropped 1.6 percentage points below the year ago rate of 5.2 percent and the 4.4 percent rate for August. Florida’s unemployment rate matched Palm Beach County, down from 5.1 percent last year, and the national rate is 4.1 percent, all numbers not seasonally adjusted.

“Even with the impact of Hurricane Irma, the county’s unemployment rate is the lowest since March 2007 when it was 3.5 percent. Palm Beach County gained 4,600 new jobs over the year and there were 17,292 available advertised jobs in September,” said Steve Craig, president and chief executive officer of CareerSource Palm Beach County, the nonprofit organization chartered by the state to lead workforce development in Palm Beach County.

Hurricane Irma has impacted local employment with both job losses and gains. Mr. Craig explained that job losses have occurred mostly in food and beverage service businesses and the tourism/hospitality sector.

“Most of these employees were unable to work because their establishments were closed due to evacuation, damage, power outages or other effects of the hurricane. This has been mostly temporary and we expect to it to rebound before the winter tourism season ramps up,” he said.

A positive impact to the storm’s aftermath has been job gains in construction, retail and wholesale materials suppliers, insurance and contractor jobs such as for debris removal.

Mr. Craig added that there has been a significant increase in individuals and families relocating to South Florida from Puerto Rico in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria.

“According to the latest state report, more than 58,000 individuals have arrived in Florida from Puerto Rico since the storm’s passing. As part of the statewide CareerSource Florida network, we are helping them find employment and other assistance,” he said.

Palm Beach County’s monthly unemployment rate ranged between 3.6 and 5.3 percent over the past 12 months, primarily reflecting seasonal fluctuations. This compares favorably with state and national levels, and is about one-third of what it was at the 11.6 percent peak unemployment rate of the Great Recession in summer 2010.

**Job growth by industry sector:** On a percentage basis, job gains in September were led by the construction industry with 7.6 percent over-the-year job growth, nearly double the 4.1 percent statewide, reflecting a very competitive market for this industry sector. Rebuilding efforts following Hurricane Irma are putting additional pressure on the already strong demand for construction workers throughout South Florida.

The number of jobs in four sectors – construction, professional/business services, education/health services, and government – grew faster than statewide over the year.

By the numbers, over-the-year job gains in Palm Beach County were in construction (+2,700 jobs); professional/business services (+2,300 jobs); education/health services (+2,000 jobs); government (+1,200 jobs); and information (+100 jobs). Three sectors lost jobs over the year: trade/transportation/utilities and leisure/hospitality (-1,400 jobs each); and financial activities (-900 jobs). The manufacturing and other services sectors were unchanged.

**Post- Irma employment assistance:** CareerSource Palm Beach County is part of a statewide network connecting employers with the talent they need to rebuild their businesses and assisting residents who are unemployed as a result of Hurricane Irma find new employment.

As the local administrator for National Dislocated Worker Grant funding for disaster relief employment, CareerSource Palm Beach County has held hiring events at various locations in the county for more than 400 workers. Disaster relief jobs involve humanitarian and restoration assistance work along with debris removal and cleanup. Residents qualifying for this temporary employment may be temporarily or permanently laid off as a consequence of the storm, dislocated workers and individuals who are long-term unemployed.

In addition, CareerSource Palm Beach County staff has been providing employment assistance at FEMA's Disaster Recovery Center in Boynton Beach as well as five locations around the county in support of the Caring Community Coalition for Disaster Relief.

"We are here to help rebuild our employment and economic infrastructure following this tragic storm," Mr. Craig said. "We are working with businesses to provide the talent they need to recover and be successful. We also are helping our residents get back to work as quickly as possible to support their families."