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## Looking up

### Johnson County's economy showing growth

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— Much like the rest of Texas, Johnson County's economic future reflects positive changes led by the lowest unemployment numbers since 2009.

Johnson County's unemployment rate sits at 7.4 percent while Texas' seasonally adjusted unemployment rate fell to 7.8 percent, down from 8.3 percent in December 2010, according the latest Texas Workforce Commission statistics.

Several market reports have cited Johnson County's growth attracts more businesses, improving the county's economic outlook.

"Things are getting better," said Diana Miller, Johnson County Economic Development Commission executive director.

Miller said the commission monitors the unemployment rate for the county each month and looks for ways to improve it.

Miller said the key to maintaining the momentum is to make sure the county has the roads and support systems in place to support transportation and new businesses.

Johnson County has plenty of attractive space for new businesses and once a new roadway connecting Fort Worth to Cleburne is completed in 2014, the county will see even more growth and possible jobs, she said.

In the first quarter 2010, Johnson County had an 8.7 percent unemployment rate with job losses ticking upward, but by the end of the year it improved slightly, hovering above 8.2 percent.

Now with a 7.4 percent unemployment rate, Johnson County could see it drop even further if it can create jobs and retain them.

Job retention is key for the county in 2012 to set a strong foundation for future growth, according to a study conducted by the Texas Retail Survey.

The survey, which provides a nine-year study on local retail sales trends in every Texas city and county, ranked Johnson County as the fastest growing retail market in Texas, growing at a rate of 9.3 percent.

The study concluded that the county's population over the last 10 years contributed to its growth in retail sales, surpassing the state average of 2.4 percent growth.

This means Johnson County residents may begin to see more retail developments as businesses begin taking notice of the area.

Texas' economic outlook for 2012 is positive and job growth is expected to occur in several sectors, said Darren Hayunga, a University of Texas at Arlington finance and real estate professor.

Texas has done well over the past few years because of its ability to maintain and increase employment because of the state's pro-business nature coupled with taxes exemptions for businesses, he said.

"Texas accounted for one in every five jobs created in the country between June 2010 and June 2011. Houston and Dallas alone were responsible for one in every 10 new jobs in the country," he said.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce just released its Enterprising States 2011 study and reports that Texas ranked sixth on the list of top 10 states for low business taxes and regulations.

According to the report, "The Lone Star State is a low-tax state that offers a low cost of living and has an enterprise-friendly climate that's paying off with high job growth rates."

Texas' unemployment rate has decreased for the third consecutive month, and now stands at 7.8 percent — below the national unemployment rate of 8.5 percent.

"I am encouraged to see our state's unemployment rate continuing to drop," said Texas Workforce Commissioner Ronny Congleton in an email. "TWC and our local workforce boards stand ready to help those seeking work in Texas find good jobs to provide for themselves and their families."