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Despite Inland jobs drain, hope seen for area

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The Press-Enterprise

For five years more houses built meant more jobs in the Inland region, earning the area a spot in Forbes' April roundup of best areas for job growth.

Now, the jobs have stopped being created, and for the first time in the Inland region's statistical history, the region's job growth fell.

In March, there were 1.7 percent less jobs than the year prior.

Nonetheless, national economists expect the region to rebound and Riverside County is helping to assure that happens.

While Forbes named Riverside one of the ten "Best Cities for Job Growth" last month, the information was based on the annualized job-growth rate over five years, about 4.3 percent, for the entire Riverside and San Bernardino counties metropolitan area, according to research firm Moody's Economy.com.

In the Forbes story, Moody's Chief Economist Mark Zandi said those cities that owed their rapid-fire job growth to housing paid for it in 2007, but some like the Inland region could recover faster than others.

"These are good, fundamentally solid economies and should rebound strongly," Zandi was quoted as saying in the Forbes article.

Chapman University economist Esmael Adibi said the Inland region's performance beyond the current slowdown will still rely on the same reasons the area has almost always seen growth -- availability of land and relatively cheap housing.

"Once we come out of this slowdown or recession I would consider (it) the area with greatest potential for job creation in California," Adibi said.

In the meantime, Riverside County hopes to secure a grant that would train

residential construction workers in skills needed for commercial and redevelopment building, said Tom Freeman, spokesman for the Riverside County Economic Development Agency.

"At a time when housing is slowing down, our sewer projects we're doing, our roads projects were doing, our parks projects -- all these create private sector jobs," Freeman said.

Creating jobs to offset losses in home construction and related industries has posed a challenge, Freeman said. The county hopes a \$2 million program to help first-time homebuyers who make a combined income of less than \$74,000 will fill empty homes.

Aramark Uniform Services, headquartered in Burbank, recently agreed to spend \$30 million to buy a facility in the Agua Mansa Enterprise Zone in the county and equip it with the technology it needs to process and deliver

uniforms, Freeman said. The company expects to hire 168 people, from entry-level position to management, he said.

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By the numbers

4.3%, annualized five-year job growth rate in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties

14,900, lost construction jobs

1.7%, decline in jobs in March

Source: Forbes, Riverside County Economic Development Agency, California Employment Development Dept.