

Late night eateries

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SATURDAY

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EP Times

IT'S AN EL PASO THING

More people have jobs in El Paso

By Darren Meritz
El Paso Times

Continuing a trend of job growth that spans industry sectors, the unemployment rate in El Paso fell to 6.7 percent in March, down from 6.9 percent in February and 7.5 percent a year ago, the Texas Workforce Commission said Friday.

Broad-based job gains "indicate that we're experiencing positive growth at this time," said Robert Crawley, an economist with the Texas Workforce Commission in Austin. "It indicates El Paso has a fairly diverse economy that is allowing for growth through a lot of industries that are present in the metropolitan area."

El Paso gained 2,300 new jobs in March. Texas Workforce Commission figures show that most sectors gained jobs last month. Manufacturing gained 700 jobs and the trade, transportation and utilities sectors gained 500.

Despite the positive figures, some job seekers run into obstacles.

Elaine Lichter, 61, left her job at the El Paso City-County Health and Environmental District two months ago. With 30 years experience, she is searching for a job in health-care administration.

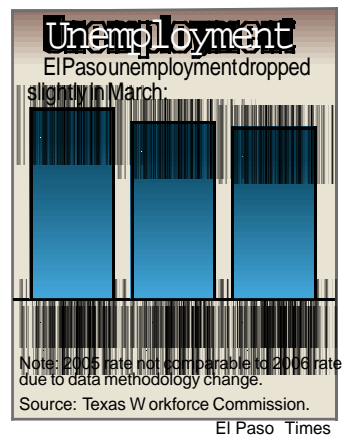
"It seems to me it's difficult as a female and a person my age to be able to match skills for the jobs that are available," she said. "I feel like people who are older like me, it makes it more difficult, and being female, it seems like it makes it even more difficult."

El Paso's reputation as a low-wage city is changing to one with an educated, bilingual work force, said Sidney Alvarez, public information officer for Upper Rio Grande @ Work.

"The biggest problem we used to have here in El Paso is they thought of us as being an unskilled work force," he said. "That's shifting."

El Paso's 6.7 percent unemployment rate compares with 5 percent for the state and 4.8 percent for the nation in March.

Darren Meritz may be reached at dmeritz@elpasotimes.com; 546-6127.



WWII: CONTRIBUTIONS OF HISPANICS

'Nobody had ever called me an American before that time. I'd been called a lot of things ... that was the first time in my life that I had been called an American.'

Armando Flores, a World War II veteran from Mission, Texas



Mark Lambie / El Paso Times

UT-Austin journalism Professor Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez talked Friday at the El Paso Museum of Art about the contributions Hispanics made during World War II and after.

War altered future for Latinos

"Nobody had ever called me an American before that time. I'd been called a lot of things ... that was the first time in my life that I had been called an American,"

— Armando Flores
World War II veteran from Mission, Texas

By Ramon Bracamontes
El Paso Times

The pride that World War

► The Latina and Latinos in WWII Web site 2A

II veteran Armando Flores felt when his commander told him that American soldiers don't stand with their hands in their pockets epitomizes what that war did for Hispanics in the United States.

It is also the reason Mag-

gie Rivas-Rodriguez, a journalism professor at the University of Texas at Austin, has devoted time and energy into the seven-year U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project.

The project, through testimonials, documents the contributions of Hispanics to the war and the country.

"Of all the people that we

Please see **Future 2A**

Gasoline nears \$3 a gallon

By Adriana M. Chavez

El Paso Times

During an average week, Westsider Hilda Salem drives about 300 miles in her Nissan Xterra because of her job as a sales representative for Cingular Wireless.

Although her employer reimburses her for mileage, Salem says, she's growing tired of spending more than \$100 on gas every week and is considering trading in her SUV for a smaller, more economic Honda or Nissan car.

"My job is out in the field, and sometimes I have to go from El Paso to Las Cruces, and that's pretty good mileage," Salem said. She added that rising gas prices are affecting her spending habits.

"Sometimes I set a limit and tell myself I can't spend so much

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on this or that so I can be sure I can cover my gas," she said.

Gas prices are expected to hit \$3 a gallon sometime this weekend, and many El Pasoans and city agencies say they're starting to feel the effects.

Rudy Quezada owns AAA Pest Control and jokingly said he's thinking about trading in his three company pickups for motorcycles just to save on gas.

Please see **Gasoline 2A**

Post office is open today for passport applications

By Louie Gilot

El Paso Times

El Pasoans who want to get a passport but can't get to the post office during the week have their chance today.

The main post office at 8401 Boeing is open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. today for a "Passport Fair," which officials hope will draw at least 100 people. Passports are proof of U.S. citizenship for natives or those who are naturalized.

Last year, the U.S. government announced that Americans would need passports to re-enter the United States from Mexico, Canada, Panama and Bermuda by 2008, prompting many to apply for passports for the first time.

In El Paso, applications for passports jumped from 10 to 15 a day, to 30 to 40 a day after the an-

nouncement.

"We're promoting the fact that the post office does passports. If the law gets into effect, we at least have a head start and so does the public," said Margie Sustaita, customer service supervisor at the main post office.

Earlier this year, the government proposed that border crossers get a break from the rather pricey passport requirement — the fees are \$97 for adults and \$82 for children — and be issued a less-expensive border card. No decision has been made.

Sustaita said getting a passport is worth it either way.

"It's a great form of identification anywhere you are. They're good for 10 years, and it's a smaller package than carrying around your birth certificate," she said.

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