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No more speculation...The New Hampshire economy is expanding and thriving into 2011

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Predictions for future results of the N.H. economy over the last several years have been a challenge and filled with uncertainty.

However, this year, the evidence is clear and compelling that the N.H. economy is thriving and growing into 2011. And as they say, "a rising tide lifts all boats", is true for N.H. as it becomes the catalyst to inspire their other New England neighbors.

Portsmouth-based RKM Research & Communications, Inc. recently released its 2011 N.H. business outlook survey, which the firm prepares for the Business and Industry Association of New Hampshire.

"These results indicate that confidence in future economic conditions remains largely positive, which, hopefully, indicates the economy will improve next year," RKM president and chief analyst R. Kelly Myers wrote in the report.

Optimism increased for the second year in a row for businesses in the I-93/Rte. 3 corridor, which includes companies in the Salem-Londonderry area, according to RKM.

Businesses in the I-93/Rte. 3 corridor have the strongest outlook for hiring, showing a "significant increase," the report said.

"That's consistent with what I'm hearing out there," said Gina Gulino-Payne, executive director of the Greater Derry-Londonderry Chamber of Commerce.

It is also consistent as to what is happening in the Upper Valley, driven by the influence of the ever expanding Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center and incubator companies emerging from the Technology Resource Center.

Combining those sentiments with recent surveys conducted by The Federal Reserve for the Boston Region, which includes Connecticut, Mass., Maine, N.H., R.I. and Vermont, optimism reigns throughout the region and especially in New Hampshire.

According to the Federal Reserve's October "Beige Book" survey, the economy in the region is slightly better today, than the same period last year, led by retail, manufacturing and consulting services.

The manufacturing sector companies are reporting sales growth for the second half of 2010... and feel it will continue, although maybe not at the robust pace of the past 2 quarters, into 2011.

There is clear evidence in N.H. that the economy is expanding by simply reviewing our job numbers. According to information received from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the N.H. Economic and Labor Market Information Bureau, unemployment rates in N.H. have dropped dramatically from 7.7% in January 2010 to 5.2% in November 2010. Seasonally adjusted estimates for November 2010 placed the number of employed residents at 706,900, which is an increase of over 16,000 jobs since November 2009.

Furthermore, a group of leading New England economists meeting in Boston in November said, "We anticipate the unemployment rate for all of New England to continue to fall into 2011 and dip below 6% in 2013 for the first time since 2008." Continuing with their predictions, they said, "...Massachusetts and N.H. will lead the region in economic growth and employment recovery, but only N.H. will add jobs at a clip greater than the national average over the next four years."

When reviewing on line the "Employee Want Ads", for the greater Portsmouth, Manchester and Nashua areas of N.H., it is obvious that the N.H. business sector and especially manufacturing is expanding and anticipating growth into 2011, with expanding need for more facilities to purchase or to lease.

Returning to the results of the RKM Research and Communications Survey, the survey included more than 300 businesses in New Hampshire, with 47% seeing economic conditions improving in 2011 and 19% expecting to hire more employees and 48% seeing revenues rising. That is a dramatic shift upwards over surveys taken in 2009 and 2010.

Here in the Upper Valley of New Hampshire, it is obvious that we are on the rise in all segments of the economy. Hannaford Supermarkets are building a 40,000 s/f new store in West Lebanon; Federal Express Ground is building a regional distribution facility in the new Plaza Heights Business Park in West Lebanon, N.H.; Hypertherm, Inc., a world class manufacturer of plasma cutting technology, is rapidly hiring new employees and have just purchased a former Fairpoint Communications facility, "simply" to have ready expanded production capacity going into 2011 and beyond. Now that is optimism for the 2011 economy!

Combine that with all the other activity in the lower tier of N.H. along the Massachusetts border and the continuing attractiveness of the "N.H. Advantage" with N.H. being in the top ten states for most advantage business taxes and a business friendly environment and it all adds up to a steady, but, controlled return to a robust economy for all of New Hampshire... which in general will pull up Northern New England in 2011 and beyond.

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