

Economists expect 'sustained but moderate' growth county in 2004

BY ANNETTE KINGSBURY
STAFF WRITER

Oakland County will experience "sustained but moderate" economic growth next year, but no one should expect a return to the boom years of the late 1990s any time soon.

That's the opinion of two economists, George Fulton and Donald Grimes, from the University of Michigan Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations. They have been preparing forecasts for Oakland County for 18 years, forecasts which County Executive L. Brooks Patterson calls "amazingly accurate."

However, the two, who addressed the county's annual Economic Forecast Luncheon Thursday at the Troy Marriott, admitted their report had been a bit too rosy a year ago, largely because they expected businesses investment would rise more than it has. With talk of war clouding the last half of the year, "Everything went on hold," Grimes said. "Looking ahead, we actually think ... that'll be one of the main pillars of growth, mid-year to mid-year. That'll be in some ways a key determinate."

The economists predicted the county will gain more than 10,000 jobs in 2004 after three straight years of job losses. They said the areas of private education and health services can be expected to add the most jobs, while retailing, construction, transportation and warehousing, information and professional jobs are expected to decline.

One bright spot is the expected addition of a second shift at the General Motors Lake Orion plant, which would create 400 new jobs. Few other manufacturing jobs are expected to be added.

"The weak national economy of the past couple of years has hit Oakland County particularly hard because of its concentration of manufacturing and high-tech jobs," Fulton said. Some of the shifting of jobs in and out of the county can be

blamed on normal business cycles, he said, adding that nothing has happened to disrupt those cycles, "regardless of how rocky it's been recently."

"I think it's important to keep that perspective when talking about job losses," he said, calling Oakland County one of the "elite" counties in the country in terms of its economy.

Grimes said that nationally, productivity in manufacturing is up 4 percent, even though the gross domestic product only grew 3 percent. That translates to a loss of jobs. "We've got this productivity growth," he said. "It doesn't create jobs, so essentially you've got to get the GDP booming in order to get job growth."

Foster said the most recent downturn "was the most severe since the early '80s in terms of jobs." Nevertheless, the GDP only fell for three quarters.

Fulton admitted that as economists, he and Grimes aren't experts at analyzing the potential economic effects of what he called "the whole geopolitical tension thing." For that reason, they predicted their predictions could go wrong. In addition, business investment could continue to be weaker than they forecast, though they expect only a moderate increase.

"By the way, it could also be stronger than we anticipate, because we don't have it roaring out," Fulton said. Secondly, there may not be a sustained return to the marketplace by consumers or businesses, as they expect.

But no one was predicting any doom and gloom for Oakland County. Cutting-edge occupations will drive the recovery nationally, and "Oakland County has a lot of those people," Grimes said.

"Oakland County will do well because we have those occupations. Our best guess is that will be important."

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Literacy auction features unique donations

Cocktails and a strolling supper are included with reservations for the Oakland Literacy Friends' auction "Books Give Us Wings" 6:30 p.m. Friday, May 16, at the Birmingham Community House.

Among items being donated for auction are:

- A week's stay in a private London flat, including airfare.
- Use of a high-performance Jaguar for a week.
- Tickets galore: David Letterman show, NASCAR Races, Seniors Golf Tournament at TPC in Dearborn, Ford Centennial Week with concert, Harry Connick Jr., Detroit Film Theatre, Michigan Opera Theatre, to name a few.
- Nobel-winner Toni Morrison's seven major novels, all signed by the author.
- Wine baskets
- A visit from a live and friendly llama, great for kids' parties.

Oakland Literacy Friends is a 501(c)3 organization that functions solely as a fund-raising agency for the Oakland Literacy Council. The Council was formed in 1984 to deliver free high quality, individualized basic reading and English language instruction to adults so they may attain their literacy goals, develop self-confidence and become independent learners.

The Council has continued to grow, steadily increasing the number of students served, services provided and outreach activities.

Members of the event's honorary committee are Congressman Joe and Sandy Knollenberg, chairs, Bloomfield Hills; Carol and Rex Greenslade, Birmingham; Sue and Martin Inglis, Birmingham; Eleanor and Bernard Robertson, Bloomfield Hills; Ros and Nick



Looking over items for the Oakland Literacy Friends' auction—"Books Give Us Wings" are (left to right) Friends president Judy Bryce of Farmington Hills; Bob Gaylor of Rochester Hills, Friends vice president and founder of Oakland Literacy Council; and Sue Inglis of Birmingham, Friends treasurer.

Members of the event's honorary committee are Congressman Joe and Sandy Knollenberg, chairs, Bloomfield Hills; Carol and Rex Greenslade, Birmingham; Sue and Martin Inglis, Birmingham; Eleanor and Bernard Robertson, Bloomfield Hills; Ros and Nick

Scheele, Birmingham; Nancy and Dick Thompson, Milford. Reservations for the evening are \$65 per person. All proceeds will be used to support Oakland Literacy Council programs.

For information, call (248) 232-4654.

State rep's bills address trash concerns

BY PAUL R. PACE
STAFF WRITER

State Rep. Aldo Vagnozzi, D-Farmington Hills, wants people to start talking trash.

As in, stop letting other states and Canada import their trash into Michigan's landfills.

Vagnozzi was joined by State Rep. Paul Gieleghem (D-Clinton Township) during a Town Hall meeting Monday at Farmington Hills city hall to discuss legislative solutions to the problem of Michigan having millions of pounds of trash imported into landfills.

"We don't want the Great Lake state to turn into the Great Waste state," Vagnozzi said.

He said 20 percent of

Michigan landfills contain out of state trash. But even worse, the out-of-state trash can contain outlawed landfill items such as used motor oil and car batteries.

"Two hundred trucks come in every day loaded to the brim from Canada," he said.

"Our state has gone to the trouble of banning dangerous items like car batteries and motor oil from our landfills, but we're powerless to stop other states from dumping those very same items in our landfills."

Gieleghem said a U.S. Supreme Court ruling in the early 1990s opened a door that allowed the trash industry to dump garbage in Michigan.

The court ruled garbage is con-

sidered a type of commerce and thus must be allowed to cross state lines and borders under the Free Trade Act.

Gieleghem has introduced two bills to address the issue. The first, the Michigan Solid Waste Importation Act, would allow Michigan landfills to reject trash from states with less stringent garbage separation systems than Michigan's.

"We do not have the right to ban (trash) under the interstate commerce clause," said Gieleghem.

The second bill would add returnable beverage containers to the list of items prohibited from disposal in Michigan landfills.

The representatives invited William Richards of the

Michigan Department of Environmental Quality to speak to the about 25 people in attendance.

He said DEQ inspectors can only view the imported trash after it is already dumped in a Michigan landfill.

There are 22 inspectors, while the state has 52 landfills, he said.

Vagnozzi said, "I'm sure the trash industry will fight this all the way."

The House bills are under review by the House Land Use and Environmental Committee, said Gieleghem.

"The bills have many Republican co-sponsors," he added.

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Advanced Technology Academy is located in the North Management Building on the campus of Lawrence Technological University at 10 Mile and Northwestern Hwy. in Southfield.



Join Us At An Open House
May 10, 21 or June 11 • 9-11 a.m.