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CLOSER LOOK: JOBS & ECONOMY

Income on the rise for Butler, Warren counties

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If you live in Butler or Warren counties, you're probably bringing home more money than the average Ohio resident, according to recently released U.S. Census Bureau data.

Data released from the bureau last week shows that people living in these two counties typically make at least \$3,000 more annually compared to other Ohio residents.

The average Ohio resident income rose \$1,800, or just under 3 percent, from 2007 to 2012. Meanwhile in Warren County, income rose by \$12,500, or nearly 13 percent. Butler County saw an increase of \$3,500, or 5.2 percent.

Updated data for 2012, which was collected in areas with populations greater than 65,000 people across the country, was released in the form of 2,800 data sets last Thursday. The Middletown Journal/Hamilton Journal News analyzed median and average income and poverty levels in the 38 most populous Ohio counties.

The median household income is the middle-most number, which means half the population makes more and half makes less than that figure. The mean shows the average of all incomes.

A number of new hospitals, including West Chester Hospital, Cincinnati Children's Medical Center and Atrium Medical Center, have popped up in Butler County during the last five years, which could explain the area's income growth, said David Fehr, the county's economic development director.

He added that manufacturing jobs in the medical manufacturing field are on the rise, such as in pharmaceutical manufacturing.

"Those are typically higher paying jobs, it's a higher skill," Fehr said. "Some of the manufacturing jobs are starting to see higher wages; they are more technically involved."

Mason has seen a boom in the software, technology, engineering and advanced manufacturing industries as well, said Michele Blair, the city's economic development director.

She estimates roughly 3,000 jobs have been created in the city since 2008.

“We’ve had an exceptional amount of activity in the last couple of years,” Blair said.

In 2012, Butler County’s households earned \$69,896, making the county’s workers the eighth-highest paid out of 38 counties and exceeded the state average income. Warren County workers fared even better with the average household making \$97,610 — which is \$35,000 more than the state average.

The data showed spikes in both the mean and median household incomes for Butler and Warren counties, said Bruce Weinberg, assistant professor of economics at The Ohio State University. The two numbers being closer together — which the ratio dropped by nearly 9 percent in Warren County and only a quarter percent in Butler County — means more people are earning higher wages.

But the growth is evident based on the mean, or average, household income which rose nearly 13 percent. However, the median only rose 2.5 percent, which means not as many people who were in the bottom-half of income earners are making more money, Weinberg said.

“And in general, that’s true across the United States,” he said.

As incomes have risen in the county, poverty rates have, too, according to the census data.

More than 14 percent of the households in Butler County are living below the poverty line, a rate that has risen by two percent. More than 50,000 Butler County residents reported making less than the poverty level, while only 13,000 — or 6 percent — reported living in poverty in neighboring Warren County.

The income gap in Butler County is also widening, so as some families make more money, other breadwinners struggle to find decent-paying jobs, said Beth Race, the community relations director for Support to Encourage Low-Income Families, a poverty advocate agency in Hamilton.

Her agency worked with 9,900 people last year who needed help to maintain their household or look for a better-paying job. That figure has nearly doubled since 2007, she said.

“We’re seeing so many of the working poor. The wages aren’t wages they can provide for their family on,” Race said. “There’s a lot of people who are struggling to get by and had been in the middle class before and had achieved some amount of economic stability. Now, they’re struggling.”