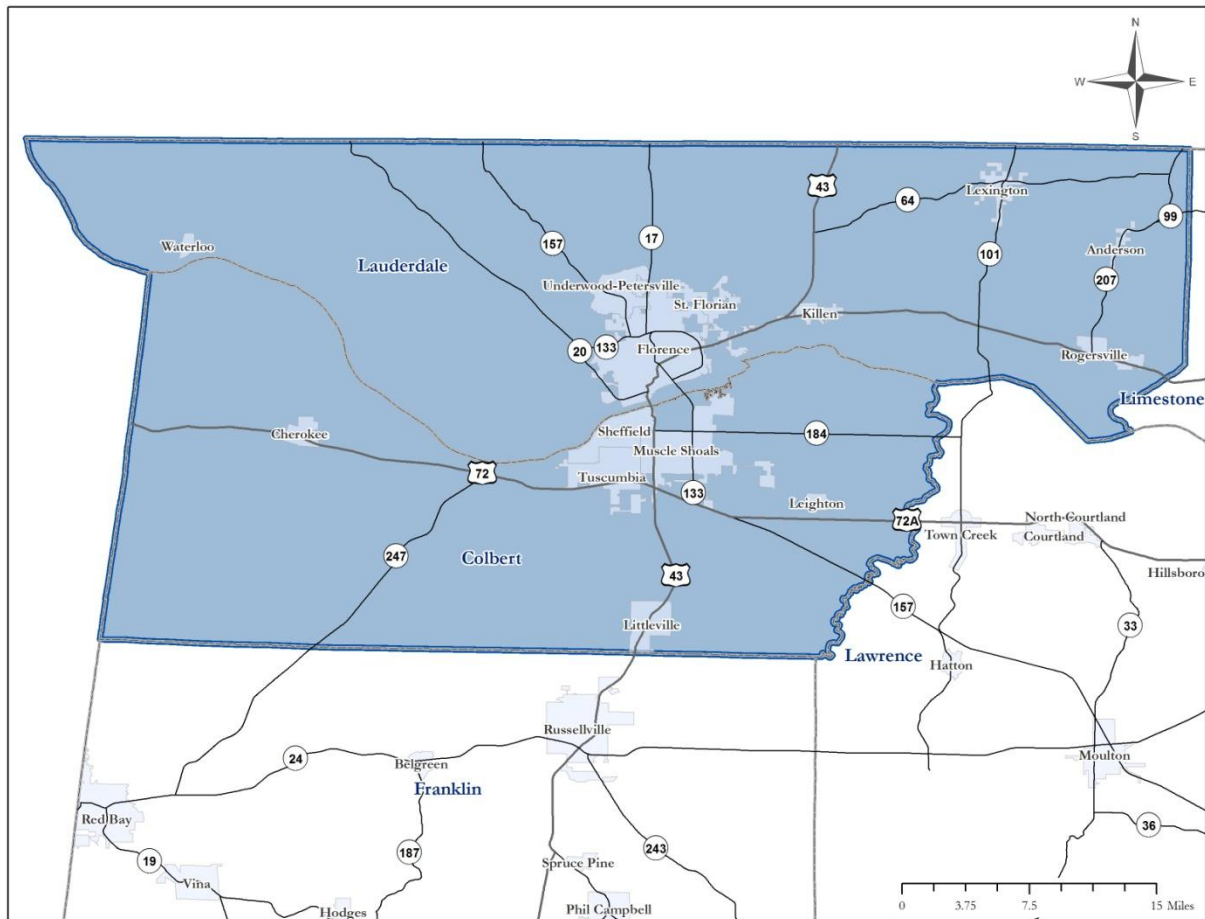


Florence-Muscle Shoals



The Florence-Muscle Shoals area began to re-cover from the recession as 2010 progressed; total nonfarm employment of 55,100 in October was up 400 (0.7 percent) compared to October 2009. Monthly job totals have been at or above year-ago levels since May. The goods producing sector was flat in 2010 after sizeable losses in 2009. On the services side, professional and business services employment was unchanged from a year ago. Trade, transportation, warehousing, and utilities payrolls grew by 100, with all gains in retail trade. Education and health services and other services each added 100 jobs, while employment levels in professional and business services and in leisure and hospitality were flat. The government sector added 100 jobs.

Total employment of Shoals area residents increased by about 3,000 between October 2009 and October 2010, a 4.9 percent increase that was above the state's 4.4 percent. About 1,500 workers entered the labor force during the year, a 2.2 percent increase that was fourth lowest among the 11 metros. Unemployment dropped 2.4 percentage points from the previous year to 8.3 percent in October. With around 7,800 more employed residents than jobs, the area continues to be a net exporter of workers.

Manufacturing contributed just below the state-average with a 12.7 percent share of area jobs in October 2010. Though activity was slow at the start of the year, things picked up in July when SCA

Tissue North America announced plans to add \$8.3 million in machinery, equipment, and building upgrades to its Barton site. Mike Green Industrial Park also received improvements worth \$195,000, including road construction and site preparation for a potential building. An expansion at E.S. Robbins Corp. in Muscle Shoals will bring in at least 25 jobs. After two phases and a total of \$3.2 million, the Northwest Shoals Community College advanced manufacturing training center had its grand opening in October.

Retirement Systems of Alabama (RSA) took control of the National Alabama railcar plant after Canadian parent National Industries failed to get production off the ground. RSA loaned \$350 million for the plant's construction in 2007, and another \$275 million for equipment. The company currently has 120 workers. RSA also paid off existing debt at Colbert County's Wise Alloys aluminum plant.

The Tennessee Valley Authority plans to reduce reliance on coal and increase its use of nuclear power, natural gas, and renewable sources of energy. This idling of 9 coal-fired generators, including the Colbert Fossil Plant, by 2015 coincides with the U.S. EPA proposing that utilities reduce emissions from coal-burning plants.

Northwest Alabama Regional Airport faces the challenge of losing Delta service to Atlanta at the end of January. The airport fell short of the 10,000 passengers in a calendar year which would entitle them to Federal Aviation Administration funds. The Florence-Lauderdale Tourism Board purchased new offices in the beginning of the year. Through the board's advertisements along with three new 40-foot slips, the area hopes to attract larger boats and larger fishing tournaments. Two fishing tournaments were cancelled this year because of low corporate sponsorship. However, in the fall more than 700 anglers met at the FLW Outdoors Bass Fishing League's annual wildcard tournament in McFarland Park and Cabela's Crappie USA Classic in Riverfront Park. The new Emerald River Hotel in Sheffield, which replaced the auctioned Holiday Inn and is the largest full-service hotel in Colbert County, is up and running. Colbert County will also be developing the infrastructure for new RV campsites at the Colbert Alloys Park.

Alabama's musical heritage in Muscle Shoals was featured in the *Oxford American* magazine's annual music issue. In the beginning of the summer, famed clothing designer Billy Reid moved his corporate headquarters to downtown Florence. Later in 2010, Reid was voted the winner of the CFDA/Vogue Fashion Fund.

2010 saw many new retail openings and improvements compared to the previous year. The Children's Place came to Florence's Regency Square Mall, and Ross Dress for Less, Bed Bath and Beyond, and Jo-Ann Fabric and Craft all opened in Cox Creek Plaza. Zaxby's Real Chicken, Bojangles' Famous Chicken, Texas Roadhouse, Kobe Japanese Steakhouse, and Donut Shop all opened in new locations within the metro area. Publix expressed interest in expanding into Muscle Shoals. Even though there was much activity, there were several closings, including Shanky's Men's Wear, and the demolition of the former Sears building for future development opportunities. The Tuscumbia Retail Development committee is supporting the Tuscumbia Retail Cooperative—small retail businesses that share personnel, building costs, and other expenses.

Shoals area hospitals were under negotiation for much of the year. An affiliation agreement between Helen Keller Hospital and Huntsville Hospital was reached. And RegionalCare Partners took over Eliza Coffee Memorial and Shoals Hospital, along with three ancillary facilities previously owned by

Coffee Health Group. The deal resolved Coffee's debts, and promised an expansion and improvement of facilities in the next three and a half years.

Population growth in the metro area was a modest 0.3 percent for the year ending July 1, 2009, with an estimated 412 new residents. The University of North Alabama's growth of 1.0 percent contributed to that amount, and will continue with the new master plan calling for expanding student housing. City schools saw a slight cutback in personnel but plenty of improvements. The controversial purchase of Florence Golf and Country Club was completed for the 60.5 acres of property.

Deposits in FDIC-insured institutions in the Florence-Muscle Shoals metro fell 1.1 percent during the year ending June 30. The number of banking institutions held steady at 13, as did the number of branches at 54. Per capita personal income growth of 4.0 percent during 2009 was much better than the state's decrease of 1.2 percent. Florence-Muscle Shoals showed improvement in median family income, with an increase of 2.3 percent to \$52,600 (seventh among the metros). However, the 2009 average wage across all industries of \$32,670 was the lowest among the 11 metros at 87.1 percent of the state average.

2010 showed a moderate return of activity for the area's single-family residential real estate sector. Building permit activity rose through October compared to the same period in 2009, totaling 130 single-family home permits, an increase of 17 compared to the previous year. Permits for multi-family homes declined by three, with a total of just 21 by October of 2010. Florence-Muscle Shoals was one of only three metro areas to show an increase in home prices as measured by the FHFA House Price Index in the first 10 months of the year (1.2 percent). That was supported by a 0.7 percent boost in the third quarter of 2010.