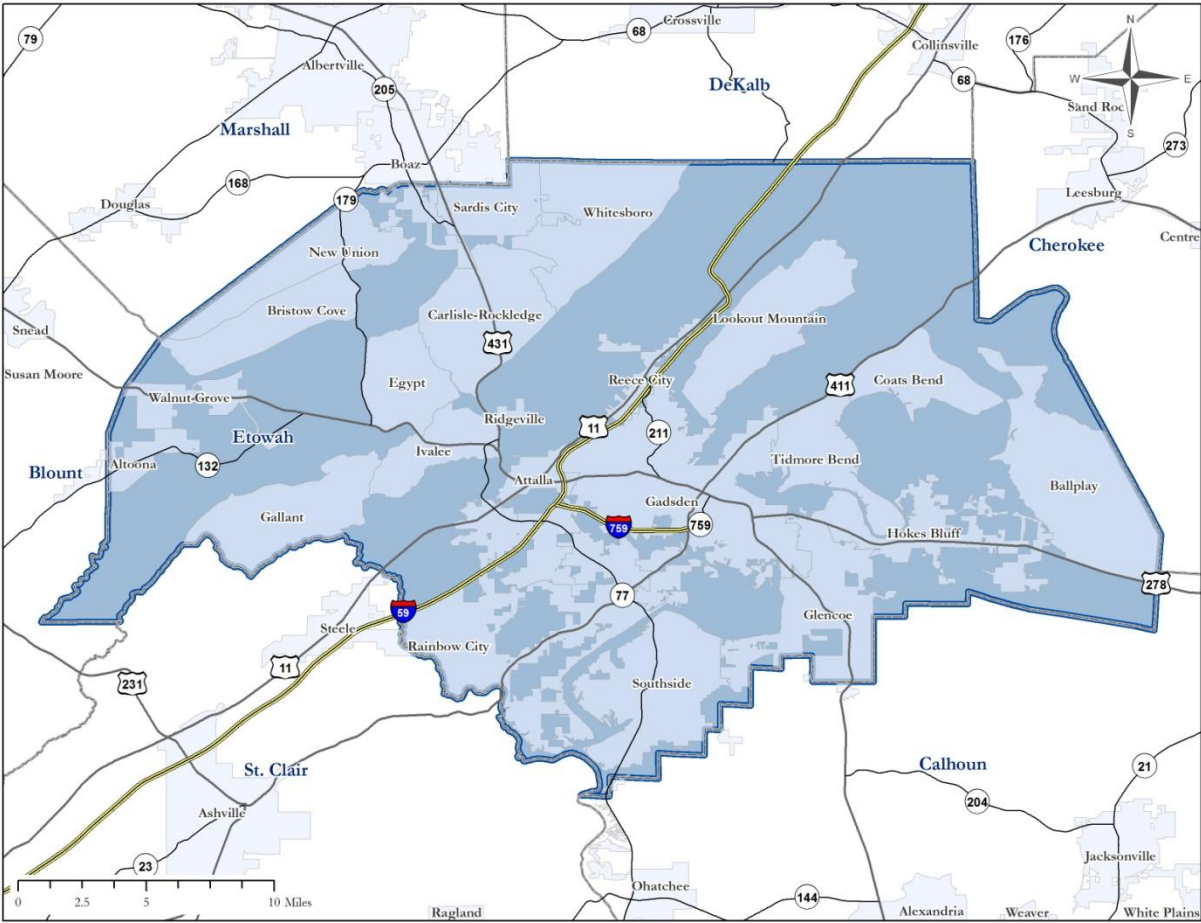


Gadsden



Gadsden was the last of Alabama’s 11 metros to fall into recession in terms of jobs, and is already showing promising signs of improvement. The area recovered 100 jobs between October 2009 and 2010 for a rise of 0.3 percent, similar to the state average increase of 0.2 percent. Education and health services were the source of job growth, while employment in all other service and goods producing industries was stable.

With a total of 40,459 Gadsden area residents employed in October 2010 versus 35,300 nonfarm jobs located there, the metro is a net exporter of workers. Total employment grew by 1,823 (4.7 percent) during the preceding 12 months. The labor force expanded by a lesser 1,104 people employed or looking for work, with the result that unemployment dropped almost 2 percentage points to 8.9 percent in October 2010.

Manufacturing contributed 13.0 percent of area jobs in October 2010, slightly above the state average. Though temporary layoffs were seen at a local Hyundai supplier, there was little contraction and positive gains overall. Fehrer Automotive moved into a new building where its 100 workers will supply seat pads to Volkswagen and Mercedes, and Prince Metal Stampings USA announced an expansion of one of its Gadsden plants, adding 30 jobs. Keystone Foods also received \$24,500 to train 66 workers in lean manufacturing. Over 1,000 spectators came to inspect

the cars at the Goodyear-Gadsden plant's annual Goodyear Car Show. New company United Casework began manufacturing commercial flat-panel cabinetry in the summer with employment expected to reach 80. The clean-up at the former Gulf States Steel site continued with a partnership between the U.S. EPA and Harsco Corp. employing about 20 people operating heavy equipment to clean-up the slag piles.

Service businesses held their own again in 2010. GM reversed its decision to drop more than 600 dealers, and the local Pierson dealership kept the franchise and 50 jobs there. Gadsden Regional Medical Center reopened the Bay Street Lab Center, and Sterling Company purchased the old Gadsden Jewelry and Loan building and is renovating it. Other additions to the area included Kobe Japanese Steakhouse and Sushi Bar to the Gadsden Mall, and Caney Fork Fish Camp, which will replace the former Santa Fe Cattle Co. Back Forty Beer Co. will be opening a brewery downtown, The Café on Broad and The Choice Restaurant reopened, and Nelson's Grill moved to a location a block away for additional space.

Retail activity was relatively quiet with Hudson's Dirt Cheap opening at the Noccalula Gateway Plaza and creating 17 jobs, and The Stone Market's move to the corner of Second and Chestnut as a couple of the highlights for the year.

The Coosa River Basin Initiative took advantage of the summer months with a paddle trip program on the Etowah River as work began on Phase One of the Black Creek Trail Recreational Project. Renovations were made to the historic Pitman and Ritz Theatres, and the old "Haunted Bridge" which spanned Black Creek on Pleasant Hill Road will be used as an attraction, along with a proposed welcome center and museum.

Severe weather in the beginning of the year caused an estimated \$604,000 in damage to at least 85 roads in the county. The greatest damage in the vicinity this year was caused by the EF3 tornado that hit Albertville in April 2010, totaling \$7.8 million and resulting in a federal disaster area declaration. Repairs and renovations continued to the Gadsden Public Library throughout 2010. The East Gadsden Golf Club and River Trace Golf Course filed for bankruptcy at the end of 2009, but hope to sell 12 commercial lots and 87 acres to satisfy their debt.

The City Council and Gadsden Rotary Club have partnered and are building a stage on the west bank of the Coosa River hoping to attract entertainment acts. Local development included the completion of the new downtown trolley station, the continued work by Miller-Powell to turn the Attalla Elementary School into a 130-unit assisted living facility, and the Banks Community Center in South Gadsden. Investment was also made in the area's infrastructure with improvements to the water treatment and sewer treatment plants.

While area colleges are doing very well, local schools have suffered this year. Gadsden State Community College enrollment numbers continued to climb with a 5.7 percent increase for fall 2010 from fall 2009. The college was able to keep the daycare program Child Care Access Means Parents in School, and work began on the Center for Automotive Excellence which will provide space for 30 students in technical programs. Snead State Community College also reported 11.5 percent more students in spring 2010 compared to spring 2009. Local schools, however, had to deal with consolidations, along with personnel cuts for the 2010-11 school year. News was not all bad, however, as after-school programs at four city schools were awarded \$300,000 in the form of a 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant.

Population in the metro area rose a slight 0.2 percent to an estimated 103,645 residents in 2009. New residential construction continued to be weak during the first 10 months of 2010. The 47 single-units permitted were down two from the same period in 2009 and no multi-family units were planned again this year. A total of 500 homes were sold through October, a rise of 5.0 percent from 2009. Prices recently rose, with the area's FHFA House Price Index up 5.2 percent in the third quarter of 2010. However, they were down 2.4 percent from the same quarter last year.

Gadsden saw a very modest increase in bank deposits for the year ending June 30—total deposits in FDIC-insured institutions rose 0.1 percent. The number of banks doing business in the area increased by one to 13, and the number of branches also rose by one to 29. The trend of median family income rising more strongly in Gadsden has continued over the past year with a gain of 3.3 percent that compares to the statewide average of 1.7 percent and leads the metro areas. Although 2009 per capita income of \$29,869 ranked tenth among the metros, the annual decrease of 0.3 percent ranked second. At \$47,600, the 2010 average annual wage for all industries amounted to 88.0 percent of the state average.