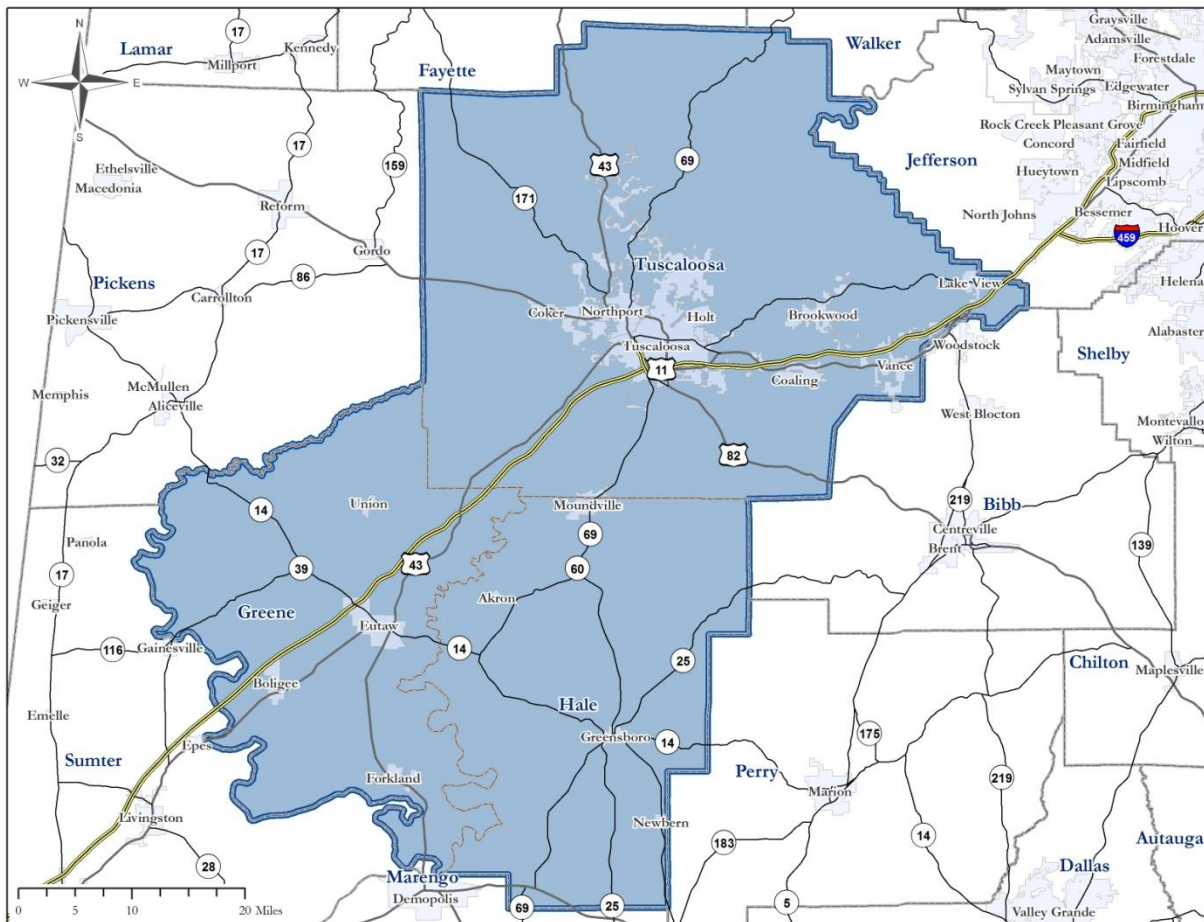


Tuscaloosa



Continued enrollment growth at The University of Alabama, influxes of visitors for the University's home football games and other sporting events, and a growing state and local government presence helped support the Tuscaloosa metro during 2010.

A total of 1,000 nonfarm jobs (1.1 percent) were added between October 2009 and October 2010, increasing payroll employment in the Tuscaloosa metro to 94,500. Goods producing industries remained flat overall for the year, after seeing losses from 2008 to 2009; a decline of about 100 jobs in manufacturing was balanced by a gain of 100 in the natural resources, mining, and construction sector. Service providing industries were responsible for most job gains, with state and local government adding 500 jobs to account for the largest share. The metro area also posted gains of 100 jobs in retail trade, 100 in education and health services, 200 in leisure and hospitality, and 100 in other services.

The Tuscaloosa metro is a net importer of workers, providing about 3,100 more jobs than the number of employed residents. In general workers from surrounding rural counties often continue to live there and commute to Tuscaloosa. During the 12 months through October 2010, employment of area workers rose 5.3 percent while the labor force expanded by 3.7 percent.

Unemployment remained below the state average of 9.0 percent, falling 1.4 percentage points to 8.1 percent.

Manufacturing contributed 14.1 percent of Tuscaloosa area jobs in October 2010, well above the state average. Early in the year, production of Mercedes-Benz vehicles made in Vance rose about 22 percent compared with the same time in 2009. This rebound had a positive effect on suppliers with French company, Faurecia, starting assembly of seats for the 2012 models that will be made in the coming year. Brose Tuscaloosa also expects to add 112 employees by 2013 with a 100,000-square-foot expansion at its Vance plant. BLG Logistics is planning a \$3.2 million expansion that will create 30 jobs as Mercedes demand for its logistics services increases. Even during the recession, Mercedes continued to invest in its Vance plant—a \$150 million addition to the body shop opened in August. With current employees now working overtime, Mercedes was hiring between 450 and 500 temporary workers across the plant to meeting rising demand.

Although Mercedes C-Class production won't begin until 2013, with 20 percent of worldwide production moving to the Tuscaloosa metro area, and given Mercedes "just-in-time" manufacturing, suppliers are likely to locate near the assembly plant. Local officials are attempting to attract those potential investors. Already, three of the companies listed among the top 10 automotive parts providers, based on worldwide sales, have factories in Tuscaloosa County—Faurecia, Johnson Controls, and ZF Friedrichshafen. In other manufacturing developments, JVC America in Cottondale had to cut its workforce by 10 percent because of a decline in demand for CDs.

Fall 2010 enrollment at The University of Alabama (UA) reached 30,232, a 54 percent increase since the fall of 2002. With The University of Alabama's Crimson Tide prevailing in the BCS National Championship game and the expansion of Bryant-Denny Stadium, Tuscaloosa saw an influx of fans and opportunities. Alabama football games became networking events to bring industrial site consultants in hopes of showing them what the state has to offer. The University also acquired Bryce Hospital and the 168 surrounding acres to be used for expansion. In return a new Bryce psychiatric hospital, capable of housing 268 patients, will be built by May 2013 on the Partlow Developmental Center grounds. During 2010 the University finished the Capstone College of Nursing building in time for the fall semester, and demolished the 240-foot central plant smoke stack to eliminate rising costs of upkeep. Administrators are also planning to build a \$66 million, 984-bed seven-story residence hall. UA climbed 17 spots to 79th among large public and private research universities in this year's *U.S. News and World Report* rankings.

Banking in the metro area has undergone alterations, with six Wachovia locations converting to Wells Fargo banks. Cadence Financial Corp., which has five branches in Tuscaloosa, was bought by Trustmark Corp. staving off a federal takeover and sale by bank regulators. In the construction industry, the Builders Group of West Alabama ranked among the top 200 home builders in the nation according to *Builder* magazine.

Retail soared in the second half of the year with new shopping events like "Tailgate Friday" to draw consumers into stores. Belk at University Mall marked its official grand reopening following a \$4.2 million renovation. Nation Star Mortgage opened in September in Midtown Village, with Lucca, a boutique, and Wings U, a restaurant, following in November. Taziki's Mediterranean Café plans to open in early 2011. The previous owner of Alabama Outdoors sold the business and opened a new store, Black Warrior Outdoor in downtown Tuscaloosa. Northport's new Tractor Supply Company store opened in the former Food Max, while Vincent Boot & Shoe closed at the end of the year because of rising costs.

Strip Teas and Coffee on the Strip closed early in the year and was replaced by TCBY. Restaurants Little Italy and Don Rafa Mexican Grill opened in downtown Tuscaloosa, as did the juice bar Smoothie King and the third Jimmy John's Gourmet Sandwiches. Opus, a fine dining restaurant opened in the former Melina's location in Northport, and though Brown's Corner Dueling Piano Bar and Grill went into foreclosure in October, it is still up and running with a different business format. While Buffalo Phil's celebrated its 30th anniversary, Venice Italian Fusion closed its doors.

Early in the summer Moundville Archaeological Park reopened marking the completion of a two-year \$5 million renovation. Northport's riverfront will also be getting a makeover as early as the end of 2011 with a 107-room Hampton Inn and Suites Hotel. Sterling Crimson Apartments began developing a luxury loft-style apartment complex of more than 300 units and 700 beds close to downtown. Redevelopment progressed in downtown Tuscaloosa—construction of the new federal courthouse continued, while Government Plaza, a five-acre park joining the courthouse and the intermodal facility, was completed. Work also got underway on the final phase of the Riverwalk and on the nearby Transportation Museum. The Tuscaloosa County School System opened its \$27 million Sipsey Valley middle and high school in the fall.

Several events other than Crimson Tide football games brought masses to the area. In May 27 soccer teams competed in the USASA Region III National Cup Championship, and earlier that month the 2010 Tuscaloosa Regional Air Show, featuring the Blue Angels, attracted between 80,000 and 100,000 around the airport. The fourth annual USA Triathlon brought more than 1,800 athletes to Tuscaloosa in September. Historic Northport also brought in a crowd with the inaugural Northport Heritage Festival and the annual Kentuck Festival. Soon enough, the Tuscaloosa Amphitheater will be attracting some visitors as it has begun to take its final form throughout the year. However, leisure and hospitality employment was negatively impacted when in early July the governor's Task Force on Illegal Gambling removed more than 800 electronic bingo machines from Greentrack and about 375 people lost their jobs at Greene County's largest employer.

Building permits for single-family homes in the Tuscaloosa metro grew 2.8 percent to 294 for the first 10 months of 2010 compared to the same period in 2009. At 257 the number of multi-family units permitted was down 5.9 percent from a year ago, as builders wait for recently-built condos and apartments to fill. On a year-over-year comparison, prices measured by the FHFA House Price Index were up a modest 0.7 percent in the third quarter, with Tuscaloosa one of the only metro areas to post a gain.

Bank deposits in FDIC-insured institutions fell by 1.4 percent during the year that ended on June 30. The number of banks in the area was unchanged at 22 and branches increased by one to 62 during the year. On per capita income Tuscaloosa fared worse than the state in 2009, with a decrease of 2.4 percent, double the decline statewide. At \$32,926 Tuscaloosa's per capita income ranked fifth among the 11 metro areas. Median family income posted a 2.4 percent increase in FY2010 and also ranked fifth at \$56,100. Average annual pay of \$36,430 was 97.1 percent of the Alabama average in 2009.