The Anniston-Oxford economy struggled to achieve significant improvement in 2011, as job creation remained slow after the recession. Total nonfarm employment in the area was 48,500 in October 2011, a 0.8 percent decline from October 2010. The government sector added 600 jobs to bring its employment total to 14,100; it was the only sector to add jobs. Job losses were widespread, with most sectors losing 100 to 200 jobs. Employment forecasts suggest improvement in 2012; however, the anticipated growth rate of 0.8 percent is the second lowest of any metro in the state. GDP growth of 3.2 percent is expected in the coming year. Despite lagging job creation, the local labor force fared slightly better in 2011. The total labor force was up 1.6 percent to 53,169, and total employment of local residents increased 1.8 percent to 48,530. This increase in employment caused the unemployment rate to inch downward, from 8.9 percent in October 2010 to 8.7 percent in October 2011.

With 29.1 percent of total nonfarm employment, government remained the largest employer in Anniston-Oxford in 2011. Most growth in this sector was in federal government jobs, which increased by 500 to 5,900. The Anniston Army Depot accounts for much of this employment, but is experiencing decreased workloads of late and has approved 750 early retirements and buyouts. An incinerator on Depot property used by the Army ceased operation after finishing destruction of an existing stockpile of chemical weapons. State and local governments saw development activity, despite little employment growth. The Alabama Department of Human Resources expected to complete its new $16 million facility in west Anniston in early 2012. The facility will represent the first brownfield redevelopment in the state when finished. The City of Oxford began construction on a new performing arts center on the site of its former City Hall. The $10.2 million project will incorporate the old structure. A full-scale renovation of the Oxford Civic Center began as well, which will include an addition with larger meeting rooms holding 100 or more. Tax revenues in Oxford should increase in 2012, as an additional one-cent sales tax was passed in 2011.

Manufacturing employment held steady during the year at 5,900, or 12.2 percent of nonfarm employment. A major manufacturing employer of area residents, the Honda plant in neighboring Talladega County, announced a $275 million expansion that is expected to add 140 jobs by 2013 to its existing workforce of 4,000. BAE Systems in Anniston, however, planned to lay off 107 workers by the end of 2011. The Calhoun County Economic development Council created an industrial park in Oxford in 2011 and plans to construct a speculative building covering at least 60,000 square feet in the coming year.

Some retail businesses in Anniston-Oxford struggled, as retail sector employment fell by 200 (3.4 percent) to 5,600. Still, there were positive developments in 2011, two of them occurring on Quintard Avenue in central Anniston. These were the opening of a new Piggly Wiggly in a vacant retail space, and a Dollar General in a former Circuit City space. Oxford announced another major retail development, Oxford Commons, which will include a Publix grocery store and several other businesses. Yume Japanese restaurant opened in the same area near I-20 in Oxford in July. However, a Sam’s Club planned for Oxford remained on hold.

Redevelopment at the former Fort McClellan continued at a steady pace in 2011, with the McClellan Development Authority (MDA) completing several deals. It sold a mid-sized apartment building and the former steam plant to Georgia-based Corinth Properties, which will create assisted living residences for senior citizens and a physical therapy center. Corinth paid $2.3 million overall for the property, which also includes an old set of barracks and nine additional acres of land. As the City of Anniston continues work on a new aquatic center at McClellan, the MDA will raze an old theater adjacent to it and create a parking lot. Redevelopment should proceed at a similar pace in the near future, as the MDA found out late in the year it was receiving an additional $13.3 million from the federal government for remediation and cleanup of properties for fiscal year 2011. The City of Anniston remained the largest per capita spender on recreation and cultural activities of any city in the state; according to a 2010 report by the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama, it spent $317 per person. The city will complete the new aquatic center at McClellan in March of 2012. In addition, the Coldwater Mountain bike trail will begin...
construction in January 2012 and the first segment will open in late April. Though not all of the necessary $2 million in funding is committed, the trail network is designed to eventually cover 60 miles and organizers hope to directly connect it to downtown Anniston. Two bike races, the Sunny King Criterium in Anniston and the Cheaha Challenge in Piedmont, brought in tourism dollars during the year and contributed to the area’s growing reputation among cyclists.

The Anniston-Oxford metro was one of the slowest growing in the state; its population of 118,510 in July of 2010 represented an increase of 0.1 percent from one year earlier. Housing market activity was also muted in 2011, as prices fell slightly during the year. The Anniston-Oxford FHFA House Price Index in the third quarter was down 5.2 percent from last year, in contrast to the 3.9 percent drop statewide. Just 42 single-family units and no multi-family units were permitted in the area through three quarters of 2011, down from 65 and 8 units, respectively, in 2010. Home sales declined as well; the 726 home sales in the area over the first three quarters represent a 2.6 percent decrease from 2010. While abating slightly over the last year, foreclosures in Calhoun County have remained high, with 91 recorded in the third quarter of 2011. This fact has contributed to the continuing decline in home values.

In spite of mixed employment numbers, median family income in Anniston-Oxford grew 1.2 percent to $51,500 in 2011. While this was just 94 percent of the statewide median, Anniston-Oxford’s growth rate was slightly higher than the state’s rate of 0.9 percent. Per capita income increased 2.0 percent to $31,497, slightly lagging the statewide gain of 2.6 percent. Total bank deposits fell 3.0 percent from 2010, to $1.61 billion.