Although the Anniston-Oxford economy had challenges arise in 2012, the overall picture for the calendar year was a positive one. Total nonfarm employment in the area was 48,700 in October 2012, a 1.9 percent increase from October 2011. The trade, transportation, warehousing, and utilities sector, along with the government sector each added 300 jobs. Three other sectors had job gains of 100 each. The local labor force expanded in 2012, up 1.3 percent to 54,085, and total employment of local residents increased 1.8 percent to 49,670. This increase in employment caused the unemployment rate to inch downward, from 8.6 percent in October 2011 to 8.2 percent in October 2012.

The Anniston-Oxford metro area had an underemployment rate of 19.7 percent based on a 2011 CBER survey. Applying this rate to October 2012 employment data gives an estimated 9,785 underemployed workers. Added to 4,415 unemployed, there was an available labor pool of 14,200 for the metro area; 3.2 times the number of unemployed. Employment forecasts suggest improvement in 2013 with an anticipated growth rate of 1.8 percent. GDP growth of 2.4 percent is expected in the coming year.

With 13,800 nonfarm jobs, government remained the largest employer in Anniston-Oxford in 2012. Most growth in this sector was in state and local government, which increased employment by 500 to 8,800 in the past year. Jobs in the area’s federal government sector decreased by 200 to total 5,000. After news at the beginning of the year that 562 civilian employees would be laid off at the Anniston Army Depot, it was announced that the Depot would keep 386 of those employees through March 2012. Employment cuts were not as steep as anticipated, however, and overall 172 employees were laid off or retired, with a few moving into vacant positions. Some additional layoffs were due to the closure of the Anniston Chemical Incinerator.

The Depot saw some positive activity this year when it opened a new $18 million small arms repair facility. Other bright spots were the city of Anniston constructing a new LEED certified justice center, and increased revenues from the new 10 cent sales tax rate.

Manufacturing employment remained steady at 5,700, or 11.7 percent of nonfarm employment as of October 2012. BAE Systems closed one of its Anniston facilities dedicated to vehicle upgrade and overhaul at the end of 2012 and all of its 145 employees were released from their contracts. The layoffs are a part of a national trend of military cutbacks. Toward the end of the year BAE Systems received a $37.6 million U.S. Army vehicle upgrade contract to provide spare parts and kits needed to convert 250 RG33 Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles into Medium Mine Protected Vehicles (MMPV). This did not restore any of the 145 jobs that were cut, but it kept projected layoffs from being greater. General Dynamics, which has a public-private partnership with the Anniston Army Depot, announced layoffs of 98 in January 2013 as part of a normal step-down in production. In Oxford, Associated Metal Cast and FabArc Steel Supply created 35 jobs with two new metal manufacturing facilities. The auto supplier Bridgewater Interiors is completing a $5.5 million expansion in Oxford, adding 60 jobs in 2012 with another 27 on the way in 2013.

New and established local businesses were bolstered by developments in the Anniston-Oxford metro, causing retail sector employment to expand by 100 to 5,800. Patriot Joe’s Ales at Heroes in Weaver is the first in the area to serve beer brewed at the eatery and bar. Cheaha Brewing Company followed not long after when they requested zoning approval needed to open a restaurant and brewery at the site of the former Louisville & Nashville rail depot. Oxford’s retail offerings will increase when Publix opens in the new Oxford Commons in 2013; tenants include Panera Bread and Academy Sports and Outdoors.

Tourism dollars poured into the metro area as the Sunny King Criterium, the Noble Street Festival, and the Woodstock 5k at Wig’s Wheels attracted thousands. Other area developments will continue to attract tourists in the coming years. Coldwater Mountain Trail, which developed an 11-mile...
segment in 2012, has about $300,000 in grants for use on its next phase of development and plans to add 20 miles to the trail in 2013. Anniston received a $50,000 grant to extend the Chief Ladiga Trail, which goes through town and eventually on to Atlanta. The Alabama Scenic River Trail organization hopes to draw more interest by placing signs on Terrapin Creek that show a map of the river trail and its nearby attractions. A new splash pad, funded through a $100,000 Community Development Block Grant, replaced the pool at the former Hamilton Boys and Girls club.

Renovations and investments were made in Anniston-Oxford area buildings during the year. The Oxford Board of Education approved $29.8 million in construction and renovation projects for Oxford schools, including a career technology building at Oxford High School and $1.6 million in renovations to Coldwater Elementary. Anniston High School underwent renovation to create a space for the new two-year cosmetology program, the 10th career and technical education program at the school. Anniston’s streets received a visual upgrade by way of a 90-foot mural on the corner of West 15th Street and Glen Addie Avenue, a stop on the Anniston Civil Rights and Heritage Trail which depicts scenes from the street’s historical center of black trade.

The Anniston-Oxford metro was one of only two metro areas in the state to shrink in size in 2011; its population of 117,797 in July 2011 was down 0.5 percent from one year earlier. Area housing markets were only mildly active in 2012. The Anniston-Oxford FHFA House Price Index in the third quarter was flat for the first nine months of the year, but was still better than the 0.5 percent drop statewide. Just 35 single-family units and no multi-family units were permitted in the area through the first three quarters of 2012. Home sales fared better; the 832 homes sold over the first three quarters was a 5.6 percent increase from the same period in 2011.

In spite of mixed employment numbers, median family income in Anniston-Oxford grew 1.4 percent to $52,200 in FY2012 but was still just 94.2 percent of the statewide median. Per capita income in 2011 increased 3.2 percent to $31,758, slightly lagging the statewide gain of 3.5 percent. Total bank deposits rose 2.5 percent from 2011 to $1.65 billion as of June 30, 2012.