Neighbor state not recovering

United Press International

SANTA FE — New Mexico is taking longer than most other southwestern states to recover from the national recession, state unemployment figures indicate.

In a report by the Department of Finance and Administration, unemployment in New Mexico is shown to have been 6.7 percent when the recession started in August 1981 and national unemployment was 7.2 percent. The following month, national unemployment jumped 1.1 percent to 8.3 percent, while unemployment in New Mexico went up less than a half a percent to 7.1 percent.

When national unemployment peaked at 10.8 percent in March, New Mexico's rate also peaked at 10.6 percent. But while the national rate dropped more than a percentage point by April to 9.2 percent, New Mexico's stayed high at 9.9 percent.

"The New Mexico experience seems to indicate a less severe initial response to the recession than the national average, a pattern over the middle of the recession mirroring that of the nation . and a less rapid recovery than the nation," the DFA report says.

The report also shows that Out of Arizona, Colorado, Oklahoma, Texas and Utah, only Arizona peaked with an unemployment rate higher than New Mexico's at 11 percent.

Colorado peaked at 9 percent, Oklahoma at 8.9 percent, Texas at 8.7 percent and Utah at 9.6 percent.

However, half the state's reviewed saw greater drops in employment than New Mexico. Arizona started the recession at 6 percent before leaping to 11 percent, and Colorado went from 4.7 percent unemployment to 8.6 percent at the nation's low point.

Oklahoma, which started with the lowest unemployment rate of the six states, took the greatest dive, going from 3.1 percent unemployment to a peak of 8.9 percent.

The report says the conclusions for New Mexico that can be drawn from the unemployment figures are also reflected in data from state tax collections and other economic activity.

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Oil workers union rejects Gulf's offer

United Press International

PITTSBURGH — The Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union said Tuesday it rejected Gulf Oil Corp.'s demand for a wage freeze in contract talks expected to affect more than 50,000 oil industry workers.

Union negotiators "rejected immediately" Pittsburgh-based Gulf's opening proposal of a wage freeze in 1984 and a 25-cent-per-hour raise in 1985, OCAW spokesman Jerry Archulta said.

Gulf said its offer covers 2,400 workers at its largest refinery in Port Arthur, near Houston, and another 150 employees at its Cleves, Ohio, facility near Cincinnati. The current two-year contract expires a 12:01 a.m. Jan. 8.

In past negotiations, the No. 5 oil company's contract has set the pace for 331 pacts at about 85 oil companies, Archuleta said. Gulf was the first major company to make a firm offer in this year's bargaining, which began in mid-November, he said.

"We rejected it (the proposal) immediately upon receipt," he said. "It's not even worth considering. We want a substantial wage increase for both years of the contract, and certainly zero and 25 cents is a long ways from being substantial."

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The Denver-based union's refinery workers earn an average hourly wage of $13.61, not counting overtime or shift differentials, Archuleta said. The current two-year contract boosted wages 9 percent in the first year and 7 percent in the second.

The union also wants shorter work weeks; improved health care and pension plans; and aid for laid-off workers. Some 7,200 oil refinery workers have lost their jobs in the past three years, Archuleta said.

OCAW represents about 130,000 workers, including 50,000 refinery, petrochemical and pipeline employees.

A Gulf spokesman said the company hoped to settle a new contract but could run its refineries with management employees. Some 60,000 OCAW members went on strike for four months in 1980, Archuleta said.

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Gingerbread houses make comeback

United Press International

NEW YORK — The traditional gingerbread house, beloved of generations of children, has been remodeled.

The December issue of McCall's magazine contains directions for four unusual cookie house designs for holiday baking: A ranch-style adobe, a two-story Victorian with bay window and front porch, a Dutch-style windmill and a log cabin whose thatched roof is made of shredded wheat cereal biscuits.

The "architect" was Joan Hayes, an associate food editor who also wrote the story.

Books are good gifts for kids

United Press International

SYRACUSE, N.Y.— Children are never too young for books, says an associate professor of child studies.

Judith Schickedanz, of Syracuse University, says books are an ideal gift even for newborns.

"There is growing evidence," the professor says, "that language development tends to be advanced in children who have been exposed to books very early in life."

Books help children learn the difference between written and spoken language, she says.

"This ability is evident at approximately 14 months of age, when children engage in 'book babble' — a rhythmic babble full of intonations as if reading a nursery rhyme — while looking at a book," Schickedanz says.

"Without the book, they engage in the usual 'conversational babble.' This period lasts for two or three months."

For babies from birth to about five months, she recommends cardboard books with simple, sharp illustrations that can be propped up in front of them.

Revolving tree stands return

United Press International

WEST SPRINGFIELD, Mass. — Revolving, musical Christmas tree stands that have delighted children for decades are again available, this time from a West Springfield manufacturer.

The stand comes pre-assembled, with a built-in electrical outlet for tree lights.

A control box permits separate or combined activation of lights, music and motion.

The new model uses the latest electronic technology to play eight popular Christmas carols with what the manufacturer says is true music box quality.

Rights to the design were bought by The Heirloom Co. after the original manufacturer in Wisconsin discontinued production a few years ago.

A limited number are available by mail order from: The Heirloom Co., Division of National Metal Industries, P.O. Box 1776, West Springfield, Mass. 01090. The $99.50 price includes shipping.