

Job gains pick up steam to start year

Report: Last few years indicated slowing in NJ

Michael L. Diamond Asbury Park Press
USA TODAY NETWORK - NEW JERSEY

The New Jersey job market got off to a strong start in January, a report released Monday showed, and it needed it.

The same report showed the state finished 2018 with 39,400 new jobs, far fewer than first thought and down from 48,600 in 2017 and 62,000 in 2016.

"The trend is not the way we would prefer it to go," Rutgers University economist James W. Hughes said.

The report from the state Department of Labor and Workforce Development gave a more complete look at New Jersey's job market last year, along with its first glimpse of 2019.

It comes as Gov. Phil Murphy has created a new economic strategy for the state, from increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2024 for most businesses to encouraging the development of incubators to find promising high-tech start-ups.

The jobs report is a survey of employers to measure the number of jobs and a survey of households to measure the unemployment rate. They don't always move in the same direction; New Jersey workers, for example, can find a job in New York or Pennsylvania.

The January report showed New Jersey added 17,800 jobs. Its unemployment rate was 4.0 percent, up slightly from 3.9 percent in December, but still relatively low.

The state's job growth from January 2018 to January 2019 of 1.4 percent ranked 19th nationwide, according to

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USA TODAY

Report: Suspect emailed NZ leader his manifesto

The suspect in the New Zealand massacre sent his manifesto to the country's prime minister, reports say. **10A**

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Forecast, 3A

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Obituaries

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Sunday \$2.50



Special-needs youths grow at flower shop



The Archway School student Isaiah Berry, 17, works on a flower arrangement during a horticultural class on Feb. 25 in Atco. Archway will soon launch its first retail shop, Blue Violet Flowers and Gifts, staffed by students with special needs.

PHOTOS BY JOE LAMBERTI/COURIER POST

Students learn skills like floral design, horticulture



The Archway School student Antonio Canal, 15, works during a horticultural class on Feb. 25 in Atco.

Phaedra Trethan Cherry Hill Courier-Post
USA TODAY NETWORK - NEW JERSEY

WATERFORD – The room smelled like spring-time, even though a harsh February wind blew through the pines outside the Archway School's flower shop, From the Ground Up.

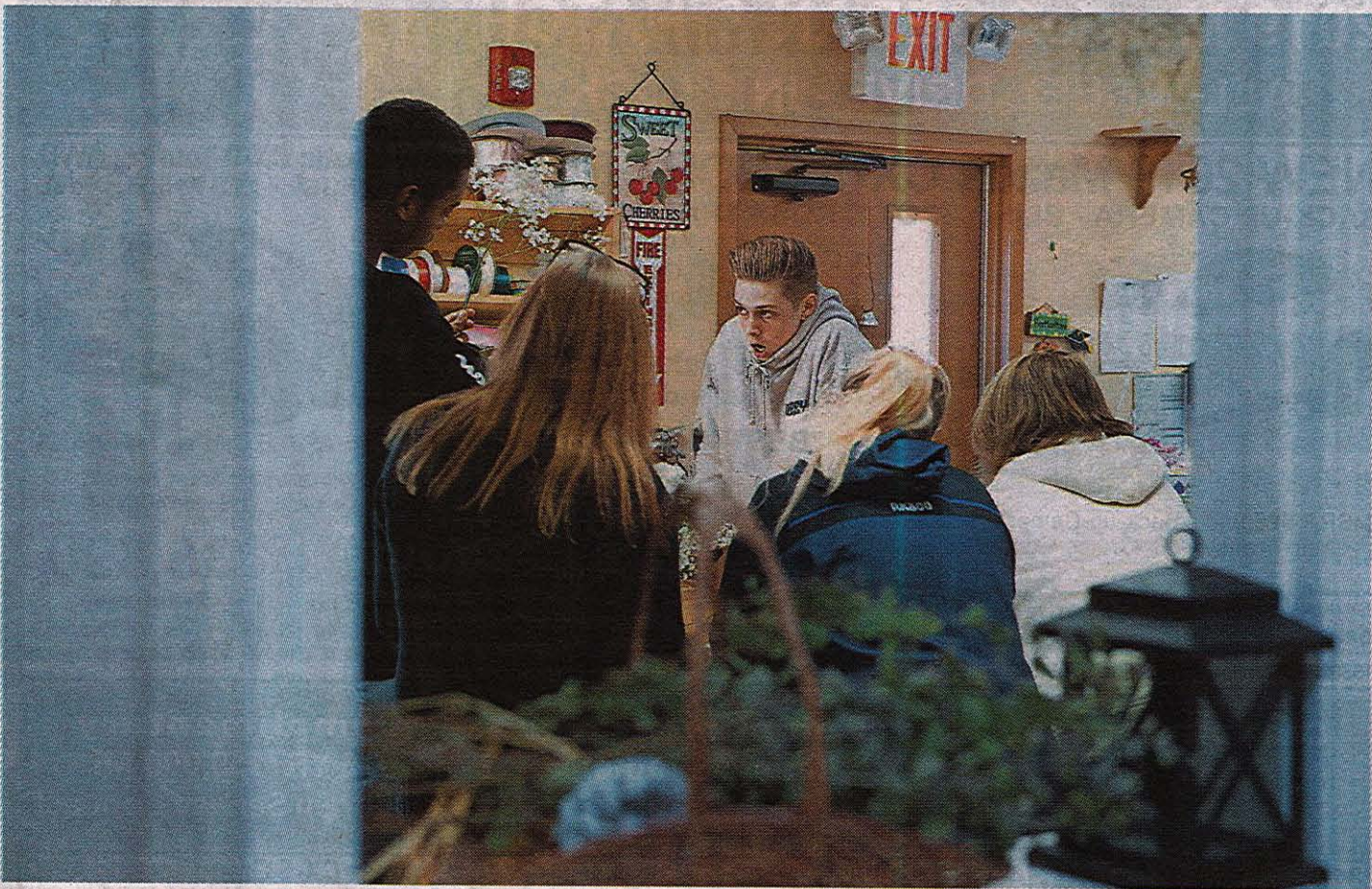
Nestled in a trailer at its Atco campus, the shop is where special needs students learn the basics for horticulture and floral design.

Their arrangements, corsages and centerpieces become accessories and decorations for school functions like graduations and fundraisers.

Soon, though, the school will launch a separate, full service retail store in a nearby shopping center, staffed by students and individuals in Archway's adult programs.

On a recent Monday, 16 students trimmed white chrysanthemums and carnations, carefully placing them in mason jars with tree fern and baby's breath. Kris Henle-Blank watched, reminding them to leave enough stem so the delicate flowers could reach the water inside the jars and encouraging them as their work took shape.

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The Archway School student Teddy McCrone, 17, works with fellow students during a horticultural class on Feb. 25 in Atco. JOE LAMBERTI/COURIER POST

Flower shop

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Henle-Blank, who's taught at Archway for 17 years, including the last 8 as a horticulture instructor, will serve as the manager for the soon-to-open Blue Violet Flowers and Gifts.

"The students learn principles of floral design; they learn proper processing techniques for fresh-cut flowers," she explained.

"But beyond that, we work on a lot of social skills, employability skills. They get to interact with one another on a less structured, more social level, and that's an area of concern for a lot of our students."

Horticulture lessons and working in the shop "gives them an opportunity, while they're working in a less structured environment, to be able to interact with one another. They learn customer service skills, they answer the phones, they take orders, all these things that they are going to have to learn and master and use across different areas of their life."

Archway students range from age 3

to 21, and students ages 16 and older will work at Blue Violet under Henle-Blank's supervision.

The store will help many of them bridge the gap between their education and employment outside the school's purview.

The school received \$24,000 in grant funding from the Woods Foundation, a philanthropic arm of the Langhorne, Pennsylvania-based parent company of Archway, to open and operate the shop.

"This class is quite important for the students," noted Wesley Roach, a teacher at Archway's Upper School. It helps them acquire skills for jobs after they graduate, and experience working with others.

"It allows them to see other things outside their box, and gives them a chance to move around; it's more interactive than in a classroom setting and the teachers make the class fun and engaging," he added.

Archway has in recent years expanded its on- and off-campus structured learning experiences, explained Archway's Upper School principal Mark Letiziano, who's been at the school for the last 19 years.

"We're doing more to prepare stu-

dents' resumes and give them valid experiences that will help them transition to employment after graduation," he said. "Job sampling helps them decide, well, this really isn't for me, but maybe something else is a good fit once they get some hands-on experiences."

For Serenity Wested, horticulture class is an opportunity to break free from the traditional classroom.

"We get to do things we don't usually get to do," said the 16-year-old Delran resident, who plans to enlist in the U.S. Navy upon graduation.

Teddy McCrone will work at Blue Violet when it opens. The 17-year-old from New Egypt isn't sure what career he wants to pursue, but he's looking forward to gaining some real-world experience.

"I like figuring out how to do new stuff," he said with a shy shrug. "I like that I'll be able to work in an actual flower shop."

For more information, visit www.facebook.com/BlueVioletFlowersNJ/.

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