Area jobless rate rises

By COURTNEY SHERWOOD
Columbian staff writer

Clark County’s unemployment rate in August soared to 8.2 percent, one of the worst in the state.
Washington Employment Security Department figures paint the bleakest employment picture for the county since January 2004, when unemployment stood at 3.3 percent. And it could be some time before employment rebounds, said Scott Bailey, labor economist at the Washington Employment Security Department. But there are still opportunities for persistent job-seekers.

How did unemployment get so high?

CUTS: The number of construction jobs in Clark County has eroded slowly month by month, driven down by the weak housing market. Manufacturing, retail and the arts are also down.

GROWTH: Even when companies are not directly laying off, they’re slowing their hiring,” said Jessica Nelson, employment economist with the Oregon Employment Department. The number of Clark County jobs has grown only 0.5 percent this year. Jobs grew by more than 2 percent for each of the four past years.

POPULATION: There were 9,000 more people in Clark County’s workforce in August than a year ago, but only 1,100 more jobs, according to state figures.

How do we compare to the metropolitan area?

WORSE: The greater metro area unemployment rate was 6.1 percent in August. Clark County’s rate was higher by the economic slowdown in nearly every sector.

BETTER: Financial sector employment is down 2.8 percent in greater Portland, but up 5 percent in Clark County. If Fisher Investments decides to expand in Camas, the sector could grow even more.

OPPORTUNITIES: There are more than 1 million jobs in the Portland-Vancouver area, with 154,400 of that in Clark County. About 25 percent of Clark County workers commute to Portland.

What’s growing and what’s shrinking?

HEALTH CARE: This is the strongest sector in the region.

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Zune improves, but iPod still reigns

By RACHEL METZ
Associated Press writer

The Zune has a long way to go to become a threat to the iPod. But it is getting closer.

With updated Zunes and new iPods hitting the market in the past week, I spent some time with each: a black-on-black version of Microsoft Corp.’s music and video player and a bright red iPod Nano.

In my hand but was easy to slip into a back pocket. The new Nano comes in an array of colors, Powered by Microsoft’s Zune software, but streaming on the Zune and an accelerometer that makes it easier to manipulate song-shuffling, ganging and image viewing on the Nano.

Unlike the iPod family, Zunes have always included a wireless feature, but it was limited to sharing songs with other Zune users (who can be hard to find) and to synchronizing music, videos and photos with personal computers.
it work on older Zunes, too. I found the Zune's Marketplace is easy and definitely satisfying, especially since I tend to think of music I want while I'm listening to tunes. The feature lets you search by lists of top songs, or by skillfully tapping in artist names; most users will probably find the former simpler, but I did appreciate the option of the latter.

Another neat Wi-Fi feature on the Zune is the ability to download songs you hear over the built-in FM radio. This was simple, and only required a few clicks from start to finish. If you don't have Wi-Fi access, you can still choose songs and they will queue up so you can download them the next time you connect to your computer.

Users who pay $15 per month for Microsoft's all-you-can-eat Zune Pass music subscription can also stream songs over Wi-Fi, and I found songs came in pretty clearly.

**NANO Innovations**

The new Nano, meanwhile, does have a few tricks up its sleeve. As Apple added an accelerometer, which it had previously included in the iPod Touch and iPhone. The accelerometer lets you do things like turn the Nano sideways while listening to music to scroll through album covers. That feature had its own menu tab on the previous Nano. Of course you can give the Nano a shake to shuffle it to another song.

I thought the shaking-shuffle feature was kind of annoying. With the slipperiness of the Nano's curved sides, I worried I would throw the little guy on some subway tracks or a busy street while commuting.

But the accelerometer can make things easier. For instance, the Nano included a simple game called "Maze" to give users an idea of how this works, and I was surprised at the responsiveness of a little, silver on-screen ball as it tilted and maneuvered the Nano. This was one trick I wished the Zune could learn. You can also view photos either in portrait or landscape mode on the Nano; the Zune only supports photos in landscape mode, and both devices limit video playback to landscape mode.

Another highlight of the Nano's makeover is the new "Genius" feature, which is meant to help you put playlists together by taking one song as a starting point and suggesting other tracks with a similar sound or feel. Or you try this from a computer, while using the iTunes software, a Genius sidebar shows related songs you can buy from the online iTunes Store.

This gave me some interesting suggestions, like Fujiya & Miyagi's light electro-groove tune "Cigarettes & Computer Games." I used The Bird and the Bee's dreamy-sounding pop song "Because" as a starting point. But it seemed a bit off base by suggesting Jason Mraz's cheerful "I'm Yours" when I started with Rihanna's dark soothing "Disturbia."

The Zune's latest software includes a similar feature called Mixview that uses thumbnails of album art and artist photos to illustrate users' listening patterns and give music suggestions. Visually, Mixview is miles above the Genius feature, as the images show up in a circular pattern around a rotating user's profile information.

I liked being able to click on each thumbnail to find related albums, artists who may have influenced the music I'm checking out, or profiles of other Zune users who listen to that music.

Beyond these features, there are similar specs on the two players. Both sound good, power up fully in about three hours and are rated for up to 24 hours of audio or four hours of video playback per charge.

Their screens appeared similarly bright, and a photo of my brother's banana-chip dog looked equally crisp (and cute) on the Zune and Nano. Videos looked very good on both, but the Nano is easier for watching because it has a larger viewing area—2.8 inches on the diagonal, compared with 1.8 inches on the Zune.

Both are solid multimedia players, though. And while Apple may be at the front of the pack right now, clearly Microsoft is making strides—and maybe making consumers think twice before running out to buy a new iPod.

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**Employment:**

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county and in the metro area, Bailey said. Nurses, health aides and medical secretaries are in demand.

**CONSTRUCTION:** Construction jobs are down 5.2 percent in the past year in Clark County, and by a similar amount in Portland.

**What should I do now?**

"STAY PUT:" "Don't quit your day job," said Catharine Keane, career information specialist at Clark College. When jobless rates are high, be sure you have something lined up before you jump ship.

**BOOST YOUR RESUME:** Volunteer in your field, look for internships, or take a class to learn new skills. You'll add content to your resume while you also make new connections, Keane said. Then get a professional to critique the resume before you send it out.

**KEEP LOOKING:** "There are jobs with more opportunities at a distance, but even in a tough field there are opportunities," Keane said. Ask friends and family for job referrals, and don't give up hope when it takes awhile.

**ASK AN EXPERT:** Clark College career counselors can help any community member—just not enrolled students.

The number: 360-992-2155.

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**Clients of troubled money market fund helped**

**By MARK JEWELL**

Associated Press writer

**BOSTON — TD Ameritrade Holding Corp. took thousands of complaints from clients who lost money in its money market fund as the company worked to make good on millions of dollars the fund had lost.**

TD Ameritrade said it expects to take a one-time charge of 5 cents per share against its fiscal fourth-quarter earnings as it recovers client money from an investment in a troubled fund. The charge will reduce earnings by 5 cents a share, the company said.

"Breaking the buck" of the fund was once it was involved in a financial crisis that led to the departure of the fund's manager, Neuberger Berman. The company said it has completed the sale of the fund's remaining shares and is expecting to receive a net gain of about $170 million from the sale.

The company also said it has completed its review and has not yet determined the extent of any potential liabilities that may arise from the investment in the fund. The company said it will continue to monitor the situation closely and will take appropriate action as it becomes clear.

The company said it has taken steps to mitigate the impact of the investment, including selling the fund's remaining shares and recouping assets from the fund manager.

The company said it is continuing to work with the fund manager and will take appropriate action as it becomes clear of any potential liabilities that may arise from the investment. The company also said it is working with the fund manager to resolve any outstanding issues and will continue to communicate with clients and investors as the situation evolves.

**Federated Investors Inc.**

Putnam suddenly closed the fund and said it would return money to clients after instituting...