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HOLIDAY-RELATED HIRING BOUYS OTHERWISE LACKLUSTER DECEMBER EMPLOYMENT SURVEY

(HOUSTON) Hiring for the just-completed holiday shopping season boosted Houston-area employment numbers in December, but layoffs in key economic sectors could be a sign of a weakening job market, according to data released this morning by Workforce Solutions.

Overall employment grew by 2,500 jobs in December, with temporary holiday hiring in the Warehousing and Retail Trade subsectors doing most of the heavy lifting, said Workforce Solutions economist Parker Harvey. "Those two subsectors along with Wholesale trade added 7,000 jobs overall, just barely enough to overcome layoffs in oil and gas-related fields like Professional and Business Services and Mining and Logging." The Manufacturing sector also saw losses, primarily of durable goods related to oil and gas. Combined, the three sectors shed 5,200 workers last month.

"The Mining and Logging sector, which is all the jobs related to the oilfield itself, fell for the second month in a row for a two-month combined loss of 2,900 jobs," Harvey said, adding that losses there create a cascade effect, "all the way down to Business and Professional services, so-called 'white color' jobs, which saw 3,600 people laid off in December." All of which, he said, is reflective of a return of weakness in upstream oil and gas.

Unemployment in December remained steady at 3.6%. Seasonally adjusted unemployment remained unchanged at 3.6% as well, for the fifth month in a row. Harvey said it's the lowest level of unemployment the region as seen in 30 years.

Additional labor market information and the detailed October report can be found at wrksolutions.com/localstats. The Texas Workforce Commission will release employment numbers for January 2020 on March 7.

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ABOUT WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS: Workforce Solutions is dedicated to keeping the Gulf Coast region a great place to do business, work, and live. Our employer-driven, people-focused approach elevates the economic and human potential of the region to attract and retain the best employers, afford everyone the dignity of a job, and remain indispensable to the global economy. As the public workforce system for 13 counties in Southeast Texas, we work in tandem with the Texas Workforce Commission and the statewide Workforce Solutions network to maintain the state's largest job-match database - WorkInTexas.com.

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