

## Denise Smith Amos Of The Post-Dispatch

Hear more coins jingling in your pockets these days? If you do, Missouri's chief economic development official can explain why.

The year was a good one for Missourians and for the companies based here, said Joseph L. Driskill, director of the Missouri Department of Economic Development. Job growth and export growth slowed a little from their record pace of 1994, but the state's economy continued to grow at a healthy, sustainable clip, he said.

"What we are seeing here is a strong, stable economy with good long-term prospects," Driskill said. "Missouri's strength is in its diversity, where we don't see swings from year to year."

The economy, as measured by the gross state product, grew 4.9 percent, or about \$6 billion, to \$129 billion. The gross state product sums up the value of all goods and services produced in the state.

Missourians' personal income grew 4.3 percent, not counting inflation, to total \$116.3 billion. After inflation, people's incomes grew by about 1.3 percent, said Jim Gardner, a spokesman for the economic development department.

It paid to be in manufacturing this year.

The average service worker in the state earned just \$322 a week during the third quarter of 1995, the most recent figures available. For manufacturing workers, \$550 was the average weekly wage.

"It was a major year for the auto industry," Gardner

explained. "We figured the Big Three spent \$2.3 billion on plant expansions and retooling plants . . . in the past two years."

In the past year, Chrysler Corp. restarted a plant in Fenton to make Dodge Ram pickups, Ford added the Explorer to its Hazelwood plant and the Clayco plant near Kansas City expanded to make Ford's F-150 pickups. Meanwhile, General Motor Corp.'s plant in Wentzville, which stopped making cars in 1993, is gearing up to make full-size vans next year. In the past year, Missouri passed Ohio to become the No. 2 auto-producing state. Michigan remains No. 1. Missouri companies exported \$5.9 billion in goods, up 7 percent. Canada and Mexico are the state's best international customers.

About 230 companies announced expansions or relocations to Missouri, creating more than 12,000 jobs and bringing \$1 billion in new investment. Overall employment, even accounting for displaced workers, grew by 70,000 in 1995.

The biggest employment growth was in the service and retail trade sectors, with 20,000 new jobs each. "Creation of jobs is important, but even more important is the creation of an economic base where high-wage jobs prosper," Driskill said.

That doesn't mean that some Missouri workers aren't facing hard times. The economic development department rushed to help the newly unemployed at 20 major companies that announced closings this year.