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Greybull

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said his company will start putting Greybull workers back on the job.

At the Burlington Northern depot, railroad workers are not as optimistic about retaining their jobs, no matter what the economy does.

Early this year BN moved its main north-south route through Wyoming from the western side of the the Highhorn Mountains to Sheridan. Workers with enough seniority followed their jobs to Sheridan and Gillette. Many had to sell homes at reduced prices to cut their ties with Greybull, and others quit because they wanted to live at Greybull.

None of those jobs are likely to return to Greybull. BN has no plans to change the route back to the Greybull side of the mountains, no matter how the economy turns.

Greybull trainmen who were low on the seniority totem pole normally have plenty of work on the "extra board," shuttling trains at the bentonite mills. When the bentonite mills were hit with hard times, the extra board work was reduced or ended.

Unable to feed their families on the scarce extra board work, they moved or went to the unemployment office.

John Grewell, BN's Greybull trainmaster, said his workforce is down to 45 men this October. Last summer he worked with 100 trainmen.

The number of employees may slide again, Grewell said. If the Husky Oil Co. refinery at Cody closes as scheduled this fall, BN may not have enough freight to run a daily train from Cody to Frankie.

Five more railroad workers, most of whom live at Greybull, would lose their jobs if the Cody train started running part time, he said.

Harold Bolger of Casper, manager of the unemployment compensation division of the Wyoming Employment Security Commission, said the number of idle workers in Big Horn County has jumped significantly this year.

In August, Bolger said, 566 of the county's 5,459 workers applied for unemployment insurance payments. The 9.3-percent unemployment was surpassed only in Fremont County, where uranium industry layoffs have boosted joblessness to 10.1 percent.

Last August, he said, only 194 people applied for unemployment benefits in Big Horn County. At 3.4 percent, the Greybull area was among the healthiest in the state.

September's figures will go to the press next week, Bolger said, and he expects Big Horn County's unemployment rate to approach the 10.1 percent nationwide average announced Friday.

He predicted that Greybull residents can expect to tighten their belts for some time.

In downtown Greybull, merchants are starting to feel the pinch of smaller payrolls. They are preparing for an austere Christmas season.

Robert Stott, who runs the Greybull Gamble's Store, said this fall's bank deposits have been down as much as 25 from last year. The slow cash flow has cut down on his profits as well as his ability to restock shelves, he said.

As Christmas approaches, Stott said, he plans to stock 50 percent fewer toys than in years past. Unemployed people who cannot pay the rent or feed the family are not likely to buy Christmas toys, he said.

Jack Kvale, owner of Big Horn Drug, said he is feeling the economic pinch another way. Drug store sales are not falling off significantly as a result of the layoffs, he said. "People have to eat and get sick, even if they are laid off."

However, Kvale said that payments on his accounts receivable ledger are slower and less frequent than normal.

Ron Fiene of Ron's Food Farm, said his business has not fallen off since last year — but he is accustomed to an annual increase in sales. This fall's cash flow is about even with last year's.

Greybull shoppers are buying more inexpensive foods and fewer of the big-budget items and high-priced specialties, he said.

November and December — as people prepare for Thanksgiving and Christmas — normally are the best months in the grocery business.

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