



WESLEY BROWN

## Insurance costs are threat to nation

A national survey of health insurers, HMOs and third-party health care administrators released a few weeks ago said that employers' health care costs will continue to increase at a double-digit pace in 2004.

That study was followed on Tuesday by a report from the Kaiser Family Foundation that says health insurance premiums climbed 13.9 percent this year, the biggest increase since 1990.

Over the past three years, out-of-pocket spending for insurance premiums by a typical American family for deductibles and drug co-payments rose a whopping 48 percent from \$1,890 in 2000 to \$2,790 this year.

"The combination of double-digit increases in health care costs and a weak economy means fewer jobs, lower wages and high health care payments for workers," said Drew Altman, president and CEO of the prestigious Washington, D.C.-based health care foundation.

Talk about news from the tell-us-something-that-we-didn't-already-know category.

If the war in Iraq were to end today and the economy was not down in the dumps, rising medical and insurance costs would be the compelling news story of the day.

Meanwhile, in its 10th National Health Care Trend Survey, conducted in the third quarter of 2003, New York-based Buck Consultants surveyed health insurers and administrators to determine projected health care cost increases in the next 12 months.

"Based on the results of our survey, we believe that 2004 will see many employers raising the share of health care costs paid by their employees," said survey co-author Harvey Sobel, a Buck principal and consulting actuary.

Heck, all Mr. Sobel and the Kaiser family had to do if they wanted to find out about rising health care costs is to chat with a small business owner in their community, listen to an elderly church member, spend time with an out-of-work blue collar worker, or quiz an aging baby boomer.

In fact, insurance costs are rising so fast that even some doctors are calling for a national health care program akin to national plans by Canada, the hated-French and Great Britain.

A group called the Physicians for a National Health Program, which includes more than 7,000 doctors, including two former surgeons general, are pushing a single-payer system where the federal government pays for health care but keeps the delivery of health care under mostly private control.

The doctors, who are being especially careful not to have their proposal identified as socialized medicine, believe that a single-payer system is the only solution to solving the nation's many health care problems.

The doctors say that the symptoms of the nation's broken health care system include: 43 million citizens with no health insurance, many more with only limited

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# Lost cause?

By Rob O'Connor  
LOG CABIN STAFF WRITER

With the recent layoff last month at Virco Mfg. Corp., the central Arkansas area continues on a downward spiral of lost manufacturing jobs.

This month, Virco officials announced that 160 employees would be laid off at facilities in Conway, as well as Torrance, Calif. The announcement follows an offer made by the company earlier this year for workers to take voluntary leave.

Virco joins other notable Conway groups, including Kimberly-Clark Corp. and Nucor, that have made significant cutbacks in their work force or closed facilities

entirely during the past three years.

According to statistics from the Arkansas Employment Security Department, manufacturing jobs in the central Arkansas area, including Faulkner, Pulaski, Lonoke and Saline counties, fell from 31,800 in 2000 to 25,600 as of July 2003. Of those lost jobs, the major decline occurred in the manufacture of durable goods, which fell from 21,200 in 2000 to 15,800 in 2003.

In Conway, manufacturing jobs fell from 7,606 to 2000, earning a total of \$234,098,040 to 6,035 in 2002, earning a total of \$199,885,170.

Some experts feel that those jobs are not likely to return.

"We need to retrain people and

go after growing industries that can't easily be shipped overseas," said Dr. Don B. Bradley, a marketing professor and executive director for the Small Business Advancement National Center at the University of Central Arkansas. "People have to be retooled."

"We need high-paying jobs that require skills that people are willing to pay for," he said. "With three colleges, we should be able to have them."

"College graduates who want to stay in Conway are having trouble finding good jobs," said Bradley. "That wasn't the case in the 1990s."

During the past few years, Brad-

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## Manufacturing jobs fewer in Faulkner County, central Arkansas

'We need to retrain people and go after growing industries that can't easily be shipped overseas.'



Don Bradley

## Going down

### Manufacturing Jobs in Central Arkansas

Year	Total
2000	31,800
2001	29,400
2002	26,700
2003	25,800

Includes manufacturing jobs in Faulkner, Pulaski and Saline counties. Information provided by the Arkansas Employment Security Department.

### Manufacturing Jobs in Faulkner County

Year	Total*	Earnings
2000	7,606	\$234,098,040
2001	6,900	\$217,519,788
2002	6,035	\$199,885,170

\* Covered employment is the number of workers employed by employers subject to the Arkansas Employment Security Law who worked or received pay for the payroll period, which includes the 12th of the month.

### Manufacturing Businesses

Year	Faulkner County	Arkansas
1998	82	110
2002	4,402	3,626



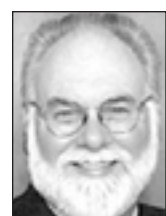
## NewsMakers

**Dan Clanton** of Conway recently spoke about "Conflict Resolution" and discussed sources of conflict, conflict styles, and provided strategies for resolving conflict in the workplace at the "Afternoon with the Experts" meeting held by the Central Arkansas Human Resources Association. Clanton is a business consultant and principal with Dan Clanton & Associates Inc., which provides training and organization development to business, government, and non-profits and offers staff and management training, process facilitation, executive coaching, change management, organization redesign, team building, partnership facilitation, and other Human Resource Development services.

**Buck Gunnet** has joined the staff of Miss Toby's Horseback Riding Academy. Gunnet is a member of the Faulkner County Saddle Club and the Arkansas Valley Horse Show Association. He is also a certified equine appraiser and has shown horses in various western pleasure and reining events and has competed at rodeos in the dally team roping event.

**Debbie Eckert, Delaine Gartner and Judy Rains** of Debbie's Hair Productions in Conway recently hosted a Redkin advanced hair color continuing education seminar for area hair stylists.

**Ebony Woodley** of Conway has been named the



Clanton



Gunnet



Jeffery



Davidson



Scott



Lauer

Employee of the Month for September at American Management Corp., where she serves as a Recovery Specialist in the claims department. She has been with AMC since 2001.

**Jeremy Jeffery**, a native of Mayflower, has joined the Little Rock office of BKD, LLP, a regional public accounting firm, as a staff accountant. Jeffery earned a BBA in accounting and marketing from the University of Central

Arkansas in 2003.

**Sherry Davidson** of Conway recently joined the staff of Solutions Day Spa in Conway. Davidson specializes in the newest techniques of working with naturally curly hair.

**Karen Scott** of Conway, nursing performance improvement coordinator for the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System, recently received the

Secretary's Award for Excellence in Nursing for the registered nurse, non-staff nurse category. Scott is a graduate of Greenbrier High School and the University of Central Arkansas.

**Lacey Lauer** of Shirley has joined 1319 Romeo as a new stylist. Lauer, 19, is a graduate of Lee's School of Cosmetology in North Little Rock and received a perfect score on her board exams.