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CER PRESS RELEASE: June 2, 2016

Local wages see first decline on record

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Wages in Cochise County fell in 2015—the first decline on record, with records back to 2000. According to data from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and Arizona’s Office of Employment and Population Statistics, the average wage last year in the Sierra Vista-Douglas Metropolitan Statistical Area (a statistical area designation for all of Cochise County) was \$22.12 per hour (\$46,010 annually). That was down 0.2 percent from \$22.16 (\$46,305) the year prior.

Despite the drop, wages in Cochise County remained higher than statewide. The average wage throughout Arizona last year was \$21.78 (\$45,310), up 1.6 percent from \$21.43 (\$44,583) in 2014. Wages in Cochise County have been higher than statewide each year since 2012. Back in 2004, Cochise County wages were 8.9 percent below the statewide average. That gap narrowed steadily to 0.6 percent by 2011 before being eliminated in 2012. In 2015, the average wage in Cochise County was 1.6 percent higher than statewide.

The average wage in Cochise County last year was second highest of Arizona’s seven metropolitan areas and higher than the combined nonmetropolitan areas of the state. Only the Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale MSA (Pima and Pinal counties, combined) was higher than Cochise County at \$22.45 (\$46,700). That was a reversal from 2014 when the average wage in Cochise County was 0.5 percent higher than in the Phoenix MSA. That, however, was the first year wages in Cochise County surpassed those in the Phoenix area and was short lived with the drop in Cochise County last year (and a simultaneous 1.9 percent increase in Phoenix-area wages).

In 2015, the average wage in Cochise County was higher than Pima County for the fifth straight year (after historically trailing Pima County wages). The average wage in Pima County last year was \$20.63 (\$42,910), 6.7 percent below that in Cochise County.

Higher wages in Cochise County compared to most other areas of the state are driven by a relatively small number of high-paying jobs. Three of the five highest paid occupations in Cochise County in 2015 were in the healthcare field. The highest-paying was family and general practitioners, with an average hourly wage of \$113.86 (\$236,830 annually). That was followed by physicians and surgeons (\$90.17/\$187,560), pharmacists (\$63.36/\$131,780), architectural and engineering managers (\$63.03/\$131,110), and chief executives (\$60.99/\$126,860). The sixth through tenth positions for highest wages in Cochise County were managers (including purchasing, financial, computer and information systems, and others) along with industrial engineers earning between \$47.30 and \$59.34 (\$98,390 to \$123,420).

As an occupational group, management jobs were paid the highest average wage in Cochise County in 2015 at \$42.89 (\$89,210) followed by architecture and engineering occupations (\$38.51/\$80,090), legal occupations (\$37.83/\$78,680), computer and mathematical occupations (\$37.64/\$78,290), and healthcare practitioners and technical occupations (\$36.38/\$75,670).

Occupations in Cochise County that paid closest to the countywide average wage for all occupations in 2015 included licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses (\$22.35/ \$46,480), electricians (\$22.35/\$46,480), computer user support specialists (\$21.87/\$45,480), water and wastewater treatment plant and system operators (\$21.65/\$45,040), and office and administrative support workers (\$21.61/\$44,940).

The highest paid workers in Cochise County in 2015, on average, earned nearly 13 times as much as the lowest paid workers. The lowest paid workers were hand packers and packagers who earned an average wage of \$8.73 (\$18,150), sales and related workers (\$8.96/18,630), dishwashers (\$8.97/\$18,660), transit and intercity bus drivers (\$8.98/\$18,680), and combined food preparation and serving workers (including fast food) who earned \$9.10 an hour (\$18,920 annually).

Wage data reflect straight-time, gross pay, and include base pay, cost-of-living allowances, guaranteed pay, hazardous duty pay, incentive pay, commissions, performance bonuses, and tips. Excluded are premium pay, back pay, jury duty pay, overtime, severance pay, shift differentials, nonproduction bonuses, and tuition reimbursements.

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COCHISE COUNTY'S HIGHEST PAYING OCCUPATIONS (2015)

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Average Annual Wage</i>	<i>Average Hourly Wage</i>
Family and General Practitioners	\$236,830	\$113.86
Physicians and Surgeons, All Other	\$187,560	\$90.17
Pharmacists	\$131,780	\$63.36
Architectural and Engineering Managers	\$131,110	\$63.03
Chief Executives	\$126,860	\$60.99
Purchasing Managers	\$123,420	\$59.34
Financial Managers	\$112,930	\$54.29
Computer and Information Systems Managers	\$111,730	\$53.71
Industrial Engineers	\$111,720	\$53.71
Managers, All Other	\$98,390	\$47.30

Source: Arizona Office of Employment and Population Statistics and Cochise College Center for Economic Research

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