

Fewer signs of optimism in Georgia

money aside has been difficult. "Miraculously, we've held on," said Bryan, 56. The couple, who haven't taken a real vacation in seven years, stopped going out to eat, eliminated big-ticket purchases and made what purchases they needed to in cash. They also cashed out their retirement to pay off a cottage on Lake Sinclair.

A little more than one-third of respondents in the credit union survey said they did not have enough money in savings to cover necessary expenses in the event of a job loss. About one in five said they had enough savings to withstand loss of income for a year.

About two-thirds said they do not plan to buy big-ticket items in 2011, compared to 52.1 percent who said that last year. About half of respondents say large purchases now are in cash.

Eleazar Baker, 43, of Ellenwood is not optimistic about the economy. The government stimulus plans haven't done enough, and banks bailed out by taxpayers haven't lent the money needed for businesses to grow and hire, he said.

Baker, a surgical first assistant, said his six-figure income took a major hit during the recession. He and his wife also have slashed their spending.

"Things are getting tighter, but the cost of living keeps going up," he said.

Broader economic indicators appear to show improving consumer spending and sentiment.

Corporate profits are largely improved, consumer spending nationally appears to be on the upswing and the number of credit cards issued also is rising again.

First Data, an Atlanta-based payment processor, said in credit transactions hit a 13-month high in January. Dollar volume for credit and debit purchases was up 7.4 percent in January from a year ago after a 6.5 percent increase in December.

Atlanta-based Equifax, in a credit trends report for January, said consumer credit has shown signs of improvement. The number of new credit cards issued was also up through November 2010 year over year.

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Business

CONSUMER CONFIDENCE

Optimism rises, not in Ga.

U.S. economic sentiment on upswing; survey says state perceptions differ.

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Consumers are more bullish nationally about the economy

shows that the optimism isn't universal.

A study released today of Georgia credit union members, who tend to be middle class, found Georgians are less optimistic about the economy and their ability to sustain another financial shock.

Twelve percent said the economy is improving, and 40

saw improving signs and expected personal finances to get better in the coming year.

It's a bleaker picture than that painted by the national Conference Board Consumer Confidence Index for February, released Tuesday. It found consumers were generally more optimistic about the labor market and their income prospects. Consumers nationally al-

"Spending will be curbed, saving will be maximized ... and we'll continue to see an overall 'play it safe' attitude from people."

Mike Mercer
President and CEO of Georgia Credit Union Affiliates

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Emily Sanders, president and CEO of Sanders Financial Management in Norcross, said regional conditions can affect consumer perceptions. In Georgia, housing values are still off markedly from pre-recession levels, and both foreclosure and unemployment rates are higher than national rates.

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Amy Bryan of Athens said she is "somewhat optimistic" about the economy but would be more so if her husband could find a good job.

She said her husband has been out of work for about three years, and putting extra

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