

## Majority of county homes above poverty line according to UTMB wage study

By JOSEPH BAUCUM The Daily News | Posted: Wednesday, October 21, 2015 12:00 am

The majority of workers in south Galveston County, who are making less than \$15 an hour, live in households above the poverty line, according to research conducted by University of Texas Medical Branch Professor Karl Eschbach.

Eschbach serves as the university's director of population research. He cited the push by some cities to raise the level of minimum wage to \$15 an hour in explaining his analysis.

"A stereotype of a low-wage worker is someone who's working two jobs to support a family," he said. "There's some of that in the county, but it's not the main story."

Eschbach's study separates income earners into four groups: Less than \$12 an hour; between \$12 and \$15 an hour; between \$15 and \$20 an hour; and more than \$20 an hour. He isolated data from the United States Census Bureau's American Community Survey on those who reported wages from 2009 to 2013.

He defined south Galveston County as Dickinson, Galveston, Hitchcock, La Marque, San Leon, Santa Fe and Texas City.

Of the workers who made less than \$12 an hour, about 75 percent lived in households that were at or above the poverty line. A household encompassed all income earners living at the residence.

Slightly more than 91 percent of those earning between \$12 and \$15 an hour were at or above the poverty line.

"Their households are not in poverty, but they certainly aren't well-to-do," Eschbach said.

The study determined that among those garnering less than \$12 an hour, about 66 percent lived in homes with at least two workers. In the next group of \$12 to \$15 an hour, almost 76 percent had another income earner at the domicile.

"With a lot of modest wage jobs, we've got a lot of husband and wife teams that are both working and lifting themselves out of poverty," Eschbach said.

The cities of Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oakland, San Francisco and Seattle have authorized phased-in increases that will gradually push their minimum wage to \$15 an hour. In September, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo made his state the first to approve the rate.

"That would be about \$30,000 a year," Eschbach said.

Eschbach's wage analysis included other focus areas. Most of the workers earning less than \$15 an hour were between 35 and 44 years old. Women represent the group more than men; although, in the \$12 to \$15 an hour grouping, the lead is modest with women at 50.9 percent.

Non-Hispanic Caucasians comprise the majority of workers earning less than \$15 an hour. Hispanics are next, followed by African Americans and then Asians. More than half of employees earning less than \$15 an hour in the county have health insurance.

Because the American Community Survey is conducted by mail and can include some outliers, Eschbach excluded anyone who reported working more than 80 hours a week. Omissions also included calculated wages of less than \$4 per hour and individuals who reported working less than six hours a week.

"Some people work or make this much, but it's highly unlikely," Eschbach said.

Overall demographics in the southern portion of Galveston County closely compared to state figures. South county workers who reported earning less than \$12 an hour totaled 33.7 percent of the group. The figure is 33.1 percent at the state level.

Those earning between \$12 and \$15 an hour registered at 12.9 percent and 11.8 percent for south Galveston County and the state respectively.

"Basically, our profile of low-wage workers in Galveston County is household supporting, middle-aged workers," Eschbach said.