

Published May 20, 2008 12:19 am - A second large project at Missouri Southern State University propped up city building totals in April and improved what was shaping up to be a dismal year for Joplin construction.

## Building doing well outside city limits

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A second large project at Missouri Southern State University propped up city building totals in April and improved what was shaping up to be a dismal year for Joplin construction.

Building permits through April 30 — the midway point in the city's fiscal year — stood at about \$41.2 million, with \$15.4 million of that coming in April.

That compares with a total of \$68.3 million for the same period one year earlier. In April 2007, \$9.2 million was recorded for construction in Joplin.

The figures take into account only construction in the city limits, and none in the outlying communities or nearby unincorporated areas, where builders say much of the work is happening.

April's total was boosted by a \$12 million project to erect a health and sciences building on the MSSU campus. That followed a similar permit, for \$12.2 million, issued a month earlier for the university's student recreation center.

Those two have been the only seven-figure permits filed so far this fiscal year in Joplin.

### Housing starts

A breakdown of the figures shows that 10 permits were issued in April for single-family houses; 13 were issued in April a year earlier. There were four starts on building apartment four-plexes, compared with three a year earlier.

"That's a decent number of starts in April. I'm feeling pretty good about the number of starts," said Crystal Harrington of the Home Builders Association of Southwest Missouri.

So far this fiscal year, 42 permits have been filed in the city of Joplin for new homes, with a value of \$6.52 million, or about \$155,238 per home. That compares with 69 permits filed through the same period in 2007, with a value of just under \$10 million, or about \$144,927 per home.

Totals for Joplin do not take into account two major projects under way just outside the city limits — the new East and South middle schools, with a combined value of nearly \$35 million, according to school officials.

Dick Smith of R.E. Smith Construction Co. said: “So far this year, we’ve had two jobs that total \$30 million, at MSSU and South Middle School. We’re finishing up some other projects with the schools. We don’t see a downturn at all.

“Our business is as good as it’s ever been.”

David Hertzberg, Joplin’s public works director, said the city will spend more than \$17 million on public works projects, and that figure isn’t reflected in the building permits.

So far this fiscal year, the city has committed to spending \$6.1 million on the final phases of the terminal and tower construction at the Joplin Regional Airport. Work to widen Connecticut Avenue and 32nd Street is yet to be done this year. The city will spend about \$9.4 million this year on streets and storm-water projects. About \$650,000 will be spent this summer on resurfacing streets.

Building or extending six miles of walking and biking trails, at a cost of \$1.1 million, also is planned for later this year, Hertzberg said.

The region’s largest construction project is going up not far from the city limits. It is the \$301 million Downstream Casino Resort. The project includes a casino with a 70,000-square-foot gambling floor that is set to open July 5. A 12-story, 222-room hotel is to open in the fall.

The project of the Quapaw Tribe of Oklahoma is being built just off Interstate 44, west of Joplin. Manhattan Construction of Tulsa, Okla., is the main contractor. Sean Harrison, a spokesman for **Downstream Casino Resort**, said the construction costs are more than \$1 million a day.

“About 80 percent of the workers are from the region,” Harrison said. “On any given day, there are 400 or 500 workers there. These are people who fill up hotels, buy the gas and eat in restaurants in Joplin.”

He said the construction workers also rent apartments and hotel rooms in the area.

“A construction project of this size creates a ripple effect in the economy,” Harrison said.