Climb out of poverty

By the numbers

$20,000
Povety threshold for a family of four in the 48 contiguous states this year

12.8
Percent of Tippecanoe County residents under 18 years of age whose household income was below the federal poverty guideline in 2003 (most recent year for county-level estimates).

44th
Tippecanoe’s rank among 92 Indiana counties by percent of children living in poverty in 2003

64th
Tippecanoe’s rank in 1989 by percent of children living in poverty

9,547
Monthly average number of people receiving food stamp assistance in Tippecanoe County in 2004 (highest annual average in at least 15 years)

29.5
Percent increase in average food stamp usage since the previous peak year of 1994

4,149
Decrease in number of full- and part-time jobs in Tippecanoe County from 2000 to 2003.

4.6
Average unemployment rate in Tippecanoe in 2005

2.5
Average unemployment rate in Tippecanoe in 2000

3,620
Average monthly number of unemployed in Tippecanoe in 2005.

81.9
Percent increase in number of unemployed from 2000 to 2005

$32,973
Average wage per job in Tippecanoe in 2004.

Many new arrivals but fewer jobs.
Social services’ limits are stretched.

By Dan Shaw
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Brandy Ronk spent her teenage years in a middle-class family. Now she finds herself among the working poor.

By federal standards, the slightly less than $13,200 she makes a year working part-time at Kmart qualifies her to receive cash grants, food stamps and other types of public assistance.

Still, it’s a point of pride for the 23-year-old single mother that she accepts only Medicaid for her 2-year-old daughter, Elizabeth Wagner, as well as some help paying for rent and school. And by getting a degree in office administration from Ivy Tech Community College, she plans to free herself from such support completely.

“I would like to be a secretary or receptionist working in a doctor’s office,” she said. “I’m hoping — full-time job with benefits.”

For more on this report
Inside: Those who need help can reach out in several directions. Back Page

Online: What are the impacts and causes of poverty? Find out in a Q&A with Angela Smith Grossman, who oversees the county’s child protection and family resources agency.

Poverty gap narrows

The percentage of children below the age of 18 living in poverty in Tippecanoe County once was four percentage points below the state average. In 2003, the gap had narrowed to 0.9 percent. The U.S. rate in 2003 was 17.6 percent; it was 19.6 percent in 1999.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. Department of Health and Human Services

By David Smith Journal and Courier
Higher pay, fewer jobs

While wages have steadily risen, the number of jobs available locally has declined since 2000. The result: Median household income has remained level since 1999, not even keeping up with inflation.

Total number of jobs

In 2003 there were 94,994 full and part-time jobs in Tippecanoe County. That was 4,149 fewer jobs than in 2000, a 4.2 percent decline.

Average wage per job

In unadjusted dollars, average wages per job have risen 70 percent.

Unemployment and labor force

While the labor force in Tippecanoe County has climbed, so has the number of unemployed workers. The number of unemployed reached a 15-year high of 3,620 in 2005 — more than double the number of unemployed workers in 1990.

Tippecanoe median household income

Tippecanoe County median household income dropped below the state median income in 1999 and has remained at or below $40,097 a year. (dollars unadjusted for inflation.)