Like many other Fourth District metropolitan areas, Dayton is more focused on manufacturing than the U.S.: The metro area has proportionately more manufacturing workers. And with over 35 institutions of higher learning, Dayton’s share of total employment in the educational and health services industry is also greater than the nation’s.

Since the last business cycle peak, in March 2001, Dayton has shed 6% of its jobs. Whereas Ohio and the nation started experiencing employment growth toward the end of 2003, Dayton’s employment base continued to erode. A look at the components of employment growth suggests the reasons: Manufacturing has been a drag on total employment growth in each of the last five years. To a lesser extent, retail and wholesale trade also subtracted from employment growth during that period. By contrast, education, health, leisure, government, and other services made positive contributions in four of the last five years.

Since July 2005, Dayton has lost 0.5% of its jobs, compared to the nation’s gain of 1.3%. The metro area’s manufacturing, trade, transportation and utilities, information, and financial activities industries all posted sizeable declines in the number of jobs over the past year. In only three industries (leisure and hospitality, other services, and government) did Dayton outpace the nation’s annual employment growth.
Throughout much of the 1990s, the metro area’s unemployment rate was lower than both the nation’s and the state’s. Since the most recent business cycle peak, however, its unemployment rate has tracked Ohio’s more closely. Like Ohio’s, its rate spiked in July: Dayton’s rate jumped to 6.5% from 5.3% in June.

One reason the metro area’s employment rate has followed Ohio’s closely in recent years, even as its employment growth has trailed the state’s, may be the decline in Dayton’s labor force (its negative population growth suggests this as well). Indeed, its population growth has trailed both the state and the nation since 1988.

Not surprisingly, Dayton’s social and demographic characteristics are closer to the state’s than to the nation’s. Like Ohio, Dayton has a smaller percentage of minorities than the U.S. has. As for education, its share of residents aged 25 and older with a bachelor’s degree (24.0%) lies between the state’s (23.3%) and the nation’s (27.2%). Dayton’s population is older than both Ohio’s and the nation’s, as evidenced by its larger share of population 65 and older and its higher median age.

In 2004, Dayton’s per capita personal income was $31,400, roughly the same as Ohio’s, but well below the average of all U.S. metropolitan areas and the nation as a whole.