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Duluth--- Duluth business soared to its highest level in March in 15 years. At the same time, the Duluth Business Index released today shows that retail sales for the first quarter of 1966 were up almost 20% and business in general was up 10%.

The index of 91 for March was the highest since 1951 when statistics were first prepared. It was eight points above the February figure as compared to a normal three point rise.

The February-March comparison showed gains in freight car-loadings, bank debits, building permits, number of telephones, Duluth employment and retail sales.

Duluth retailers agreed that despite snow storms and generally bad weather, the more dynamic economy in Duluth and the surrounding area were major factors in the sharp business upturn.

Other positive factors were an earlier Easter date, more effective promotional work, increased Canadian traffic, and heavier purchases of big-ticket items such as boats, cars, furniture and household appliances.

Employment in retail trade increased during March by 500 workers or eight per cent over the same month a year ago and the average work week in retail trade rose by 2.5% over last year's average of 31.7 hours.

The Duluth Business Index is produced by the UMD Department of Economics in cooperation with the Duluth Chamber of Commerce, the Duluth Industrial Bureau, and the Duluth office of the Minnesota State Employment Service. The Index is authored by Glenn O. Gronseth, research analyst, Minnesota State Employment Service, and Dr. Cecil M. Meyers, head of Economics at UMD.

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The March index was nine points higher than for the same month in 1965 with only one category showing a decrease-- commercial and industrial electric power, down in part due to the early March snow storm which caused many electric outages.

Grain receipts were up 57% in March over the same month in 1965 while outbound shipments rose almost 50%. Construction employment was 600 workers or 47% higher than a year ago.

Duluth employment in March was 2800 over the same month last year paced by an 800 worker rise in metalworking. Construction, government and retail employment also increased significantly.

State metal-mining in March was up 800 over the same period last year, reaching a total of 12,400 workers.