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DULUTH -- An all-time February high in Duluth business activity placed the city's economy about 7% ahead of last year's record pace, according to the unadjusted Duluth Business Index released today.

The February index of 86 (1957-1959=100) is three points above the comparable month in 1966, repeating the trend of recent years toward successive gains in the first quarter.

January's high level of business was enough to absorb a nine-point decline in February and still set a record even though the normal January-February drop has been less than one point.

Freight carloadings and bank debits were off more than usual but postal receipts were up contrary to established seasonal trends. Commercial and industrial electric power was off slightly but residential electric power was up slightly.

February building permits issued and grain shipments were below the previous month while Duluth employment levels remained the same and job totals in state metal mining rose by one point.

Number of telephones, number of electric customers and Duluth retail sales were about the same. Despite the coldest February in 31 years, retail sales managed to post a fractional gain. General merchandise was off 10% while men's and women's apparel sales dropped 5%.

The Index is published by the UMD Department of Economics in cooperation with the Minnesota Department of Employment Security, Duluth Chamber of Commerce and the Duluth Industrial Bureau. It is compiled by Dr. Cecil H. Meyers, professor and head of economics at UMD, and Glenn O. Gronseth, research analyst for the Minnesota State Employment Service, Duluth.