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Duluth--- The Duluth Business Index today reported the city's January, 1968 level of business as the second highest since 1951 when economic data first became available.

The index of 94 for January, 1968 was exceeded only by the 95 point level of January, 1967 (1957-1959=100). Strong gains over last year were noted in bank debits, electric power consumption, Duluth employment and retail sales.

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

"Generally speaking, the economy of Duluth is faring about as well as last year," say the authors. They note that with the exception of the number of electric customers, grain activity and a decline in building permit value, all components of the Index that have reportable activity in January recorded gains over January 1967.

The January unadjusted index of retail sales volume was 107 compared to 97 for a year ago, represneting a 10% gain. General merchandise stores were up 12% over last year, and apparel shops showed a 19% gain.

Nationally, retail sales for January recorded a 6% gain over last year.

In a December to January comparison, the level of business fell seasonally by 15 points -- two points less than normal for this period.

Freight carloadings were down more than usual from December, reflecting a 40% drop in rail receipts of grain. Bank debits posted a five point loss, and the value of building permits issued and under construction was down substantially from December.

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Electric power consumption for commercial and residential use recorded gains over December. Postal receipts were down far less than the usual average for the December-January period, due in part to the postal rate increase.

Also recording monthly losses were grain shipments and employment levels.