



Get Connected

May, 2018

Area GED Grads Honored

The Adult Education program at Rock Valley College held its annual GED Recognition Ceremony on May 10 on the RVC main campus. Graduates participating in the ceremony were among the more than 188 students who completed their high school equivalency during the past twelve months. Of the 188 being recognized, 90 were enrolled in The Workforce Connection Elevate program.

Annually, the Rock Valley College Adult Education program serves approximately 2,000 adults with reading levels ranging from fourth grade to college-entry and beyond. The ceremony also recognized the achievements of students enrolled in the college's ESL classes.



Megan Bounds (left) , a recent graduate of The Workforce Connection Elevate program, was a student speaker at the RVC ceremony. According to her counselor, Megan overcame many barriers, including having never attended high school before, in order to obtain her GED to better her and her daughter's future. Russell Richard (center, above) is enrolled at RVC and is expected to continue his education in information technology with assistance from programs offered through The Workforce Connection.

Highland Community College in Freeport will host its annual High School Equivalency Recognition Ceremony on May 23rd.

In 2014, the GED test was completely overhauled, making it a computer-based test to correlate with Common Core State Standards and College and Career Readiness Standards. According to statistics, GED completers and high school graduates earn on average \$9,400 more annually and have a 3% lower unemployment rate than those who do not complete. *(photos from RVC)*



The Workforce Connection Elevate program for young adults ages 17-24 has posted signs (pictured left) onboard RMTD buses to reach potential new participants.

“Different Skills, Different Gaps”

from a report by Burning Glass Technologies and the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation (March 2018)

The U.S. labor market is as tight as it has been since the Great Recession, with unemployment at 4.1% in December 2017. Yet employers continue to struggle to find the skilled labor they need. If job creation in the aggregate isn't solving the problem, how can we identify and address the specific places where supply isn't meeting demand?

An overall surplus of workers doesn't offer much insight into the challenges of a specific industry looking to fill specific roles requiring specific skills. In the aggregate, across all the occupations studied, we found there were 5% more job openings than workers. But in 12 specific career areas, we found that demand for workers exceeded available supply, adding up to a total skills gap of 4.4 million openings. The categories with the largest shortages include:

- Health Care: 1,153,617 openings
- Business and Financial Operations: 985,214 openings
- Office and Administrative Support: 461,263 openings
- Sales: 388,857 openings
- Computers and Mathematics: 356,527 openings

Different industries are suffering skills gaps for different reasons including too few workers in the training pipeline or changing role requirements that lead to misalignment. Some fields, such as health care practitioners, computer and information scientists, and information security analysts suffer from a shortage of workers and long lead times in training new ones. In other areas of the job market, such as office and administrative jobs, hiring and training systems seem to be misaligned as employers raise the bar for hiring. High- and middle-skill occupations tend to have shortages, while low-skill occupations have a surplus of workers.

The solutions to the gap, therefore, need to be tailored to specific industries. Key implications include:

1. A need for improved alignment between education and workforce systems and a rapidly changing labor market. Well-aligned programs are closely linked to labor market demand and deliver good outcomes in terms of jobs and wages for graduates.
2. A need for an expanded employer leadership role in those systems. Employers must not serve merely as advisors, but also play a more significant role as customers of the education and training systems to ensure their demand for a skilled and competitive workforce is met.
3. A need for improved employer signaling, particularly around the changing competency and credentialing requirements for the fastest growing and hardest to fill jobs. In a rapidly evolving job market clear and effective signaling is critical for training providers to assess and address the specific skill needs of employers.

The full report is available on the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation website

https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/sites/default/files/Skills_Gap_Different_Skills_Different_Gaps_FINAL.pdf



From the Rockford Chamber of Commerce VOICE.....

Matching Right Skills with the Right Jobs

By Lisa M. Bly

The Workforce Connection recently held employer forums with small to midsize manufacturers. During the conversation, we heard the consistent refrain we often hear from employers, “job seekers lack soft skills.” Additionally, employers say the talent pool doesn’t possess the skills they require for open positions. There’s a disconnect, the supply of jobseekers is not meeting the demand of employers. Not only is labor market participation low, but jobseekers tend to see jobs as disposable when they are plentiful. Those who decide to participate in the labor market know they have options and can rotate employers, depending on who’s paying the most at any given time. Furthermore, with unemployment the lowest it’s been in nearly twenty years, there are more jobs than jobseekers.

Far too often, there is reference to the skills gap, which has varying root causes and is not linked to a singular factor. There are instances where the skills an employer needs are unique to that employer and then there are unique skills related to specific occupations. No matter how it’s phrased, the skills individuals possess don’t match the skills employers expect of individuals. Whether there is a lack of essential skills required for today’s workplace or a candidate lacks technical skills, employers are struggling to find qualified talent. Solutions are as varied as the skills gaps.

The Workforce Connection works with regional training providers and employers to develop solutions to workforce issues. Oftentimes, an education plan is part of the solution. Education plans vary from short-term training that can be done in less than four months, work-based learning or traditional learning methods that can take up to two years. Other times, on the job training between an individual and an employer can be quite effective.

I’m convinced that solutions reside in our region and collectively we can develop our workforce and meet the needs of our local employers. The goal is to connect the right employer with the right jobseeker.

We further realize that without skills and experience, it’s highly unlikely that an individual can be a successful employee. Our aim is to get individuals the skills they need, provide opportunities to utilize the skills they acquire and ultimately, obtain and retain permanent employment. This is the ideal scenario for jobseekers, employers and our regional workforce.

Get Connected on





Congratulations to TWC board member Sam Schmitz from Goodwill Industries on his retirement. (pictured left with Board Chair Karen Brown) and to Dr. Lisa Bly, our Executive Director, (pictured right) on the completion of her doctorate in Educational Leadership at the University of St. Francis.

Unemployment Down Compared to 2017

According to the most recent report from the Illinois Department of Employment Security, the unemployment rate in the three county workforce area was 5% in March, down from 8.1% a year ago, but up slightly from February of this year. The unemployment rate was high in early 2017 due to local layoffs in the auto industry.

IDES estimates there were more than 178,000 people working in Boone, Stephenson and Winnebago Counties in March with nearly 9400 listed as being unemployed.

The monthly Help Wanted report for March lists the most job openings in our area were in truck driving, nursing, customer service and sales positions.

For more information, check The Workforce Connection website and click "Labor Market".

The mission of the board of **The Workforce Connection** is to create a competitive, skilled and educated workforce by providing a system for individuals to gain meaningful employment responsive to the needs of business.

The Workforce Connection is a partnership of state and federally funded employment and training programs and educational entities committed to providing a workforce that meets the needs of our business community, now and in the future.

The One-Stop Centers in Rockford, Freeport and Belvidere provide one contact for employers to find workers and for job-seekers to receive training, education and employment services

Next Board Meeting

Tuesday, June 5th @ 8:00am

The Workforce Connection Board & Chief Elected Officials

Committee members will be notified by email of scheduled committee meetings.

This schedule is tentative. You will receive an email officially informing you of a scheduled board or committee meeting. Please let us know if you are unable to attend. The Illinois Open Meetings law does not allow us to conduct any business without a quorum.

The Workforce Connection— an Illinois WorkNet Center and partner in the American Job Center network. This program is funded by The Workforce Connection, Inc., Ill Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity, and the U.S. Department of Labor.

The Workforce Connection is an equal opportunity employer/program. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. Voice telephone numbers may be reached by persons using TTY/TDD equipment by calling TTY (800) 526-0844 or 711. Contact the Equal Opportunity Officer at (815)395-6688. This program is subject to the provisions of the "Jobs for Veteran's Act" Public Law 107-288, which provides priority of services to veterans and spouses of certain veterans.

Get Connected!