

# Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce

## Workforce Task Force Overview and Recommendations

### *Workforce is still job number one*

#### **Overview**

The Board of Directors of the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce identified workforce challenges as a priority issue for 2001. The four workforce elements or challenges are availability, growth, development, and retention.

The Chamber identified more than 35 volunteers, representing business, education, government, and community organizations, to serve on a task force to address these workforce challenges.

The Workforce Task Force is charged with the following objective: *To make recommendations to the Chamber Board of Directors relative to their role in ensuring an adequate number of qualified workers to meet the future needs of Springfield area employers. In short, the challenge and focus is to recruit, train, and retain a qualified workforce.*

Upon a review of existing workforce programs, as well as best practices across the country, the task force divided into smaller groups to address various factors. The four groups include:

- 1) Defining a qualified workforce. Determine the minimum characteristics needed to meet area business needs.
- 2) How to reach out to the residents who are not in the workforce (e.g. retirees, stay at home parents, economically disadvantaged, dislocated, unemployed, etc.)
- 3) How to assist the current workforce (underemployed and employed but under-skilled)
- 4) How to attract a new workforce to the area (marketing and attraction)

#### **Recommendations**

Thanks to the participating volunteers, the following recommendations have been identified.

##### Define a qualified workforce

- Challenge area employers to voluntarily pledge that they require newly-hired employees for full-time positions to either have a high school diploma or equivalent (GED), or make a commitment to complete the GED. This should be a joint commitment between the employer and employee. (This recommendation is modeled after St. Joseph's Profit in Education program.)
- The following characteristics should be adopted by area employers and educators as a basis of what is required to produce a quality workforce that will meet area employers' immediate and long-term needs. These characteristics fall within four main areas: basic

skills, values, work ethic, and job skills. These skills also include elements of the Work Keys program, which is a nationally recognized assessment tool to ensure workplace readiness.

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Description</b>
Work Ethic	Be responsible and committed to doing a task well or doing a good day's work. This includes showing up for work, being prepared to work, and not looking for ways to cut corners at the expense of quality. It also includes a sense of self-accomplishment and gratification that comes from knowing you did the job right the first time and it's done well. A willingness to ensure that commitments made are kept. This basic foundation has to start at home with the parents.
Honesty	A truthful approach in all actions. A willingness to admit faults or weaknesses. It includes an ability to diagnose an audience in order to share information that is understandable and appropriate to the audience. Best modeled by parents or mentors at an early age and reinforced through positive feedback.
Communication Skills	Reading skills, verbal (oral) skills, writing skills, and listening skills. The ability to read and interpret. The ability to convey thoughts, ideas, and concerns to others. The ability to understand what others are communicating and clarify that understanding.
Ability to Learn	A willingness to be open to learning new concepts, ideas, or other ways of doing things. A desire or curiosity to want to know more. Disciplined and organized in the thinking process.
Dependability	Tied to work ethic. It includes a demonstration of follow-through on commitments so that others can rely upon an individual and trust that commitments made will be kept. A willingness to ensure that promises are kept, deadlines are met, etc. so that integrity can be established.
Teamwork	Approaching job responsibilities with a sense of team commitment. The ability to support team members and wanting the team to succeed versus the need to be individually recognized.
Sense of Fairness	Being sensitive to the needs of others. The ability to see other sides of issues and attempt to understand other points of view.
Flexibility or Adaptability	Being open to change. A willingness to learn new ways.
Basic Problem Solving	Exploring and examining options and outcomes. Reviewing possible outcomes to determine the best course of action.
Ability to Use Technology	Basic keyboard functions. A willingness to try technology, whether it be using the keypad on a phone to select options, making selections on a banking machine, or basic computer skills for accessing data.

Entrepreneurial Inclination	The ability to act independently to take ownership of a task, be creative, and be sensitive to possible outcomes. Use initiative to see what needs to be done and do so without direct or constant supervision.
Goal Setting	The ability to set goals and achieve them. Includes the ability to monitor ones own progress and evaluate the end product.
Basic Number Functions	Manipulation of numbers. Basic number skills such as adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing. The ability to read and transfer numbers.
Focus on Health and Wellness	A focus on health and fitness will support the mental and physical well being of an individual on and off the job. It will help instill good person hygiene and help in dealing with stress. Good role modeling will also help pass on this quality to offspring, who are the workforce of the future.
Respect for Self and Respect for Others	Treat others the way you want to be treated. Respect the diversity in others. Demonstrate a self-worth. Provide the “customer service” to others that you would like to receive.
Appropriate Education and Experience	Education and experience that is appropriate to the job level and job environment. This will vary from industry to industry and job to job. Usually at least a high school diploma.

- Continue to play an active role in the development of a “credential certificate” program. This program was initiated by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in coordination with local and regional organizations including the Chamber, Ozarks Technical Community College, Missouri Career Center, Department of Family Services, and others. The credential certificate will be available to anyone, will not be less than a GED, and will not replace a GED. Its purpose is to complement an existing education and develop “workplace readiness skills.” The working group has adopted the above characteristics as the “workplace readiness skills” for individuals receiving the certificate. This certificate has the potential to be an effective workforce tool for employers and will complement other task force recommendations.
- Promote a community-based character education program. Character education plays a key role in quality workers. The purpose is to teach children and adults that character counts. This program will incorporate the Good Community Values identified in 1999, as well as other best practices implemented in St. Joseph, MO and Downers Grove, IL. This character education program will be a community-based program, rather than just school-based. All community organizations, agencies, businesses and educational institutions will be encouraged to participate.

- ✓ *The desired outcomes of these recommendations are to reduce the number of young adults dropping out of school, instill character and community values, and increase the overall educational and skill level of area workers. Together, this will improve the long-term availability of a quality workforce.*

#### How to reach out to the residents who are not in the workforce

- Conduct a survey of area employers to ascertain unique employment opportunities available to individuals not currently in the workforce (the number of individuals is estimated to be more than 80,000 in the 10-county area). These unique opportunities may include part-time, flexible scheduling, weekend only, job sharing, etc.
  - Promote these employment opportunities to the residents interested in these positions via website, job fair, marketing efforts, school newspapers, etc.
  - Educate employers that these types of employment opportunities may be necessary for them to find the workforce they need. Because of the tight labor market, employers need to be open to including these types of employment opportunities.
  - Develop an awareness of the benefits retirees and older workers can add to the workforce. Employers can take advantage of the work ethic and skills of older workers, but must be flexible and innovative regarding work schedules (see *How to attract new workforce to the area*)
- ✓ *The desired outcomes of these recommendations are to link nonworking residents to employment opportunities that fit their unique life style/schedule requirements, and at the same time, increase the number of employers willing to adapt to today's workers and the need for flexible scheduling.*

#### How to assist the current workforce

- Promote and collaborate with the Missouri Career Center, Ozarks Technical Community College, Drury University, Southwest Missouri State, Evangel University and others regarding opportunities of additional training and education for under skilled workers.
- Ensure employers understand the costs of under skilled workers as well as value of promoting the underemployed within the organization.
- Ensure employees understand the importance of continuous training and education, and the opportunities available.
- Promote the value and initiation of educational/tuition assistance programs by local businesses.

- Build a stronger link between employers and the Missouri Career Center regarding what services this organization can provide to businesses and individuals. Promote the Missouri WORKS web page ([www.missouriworks.com](http://www.missouriworks.com)).
- Continue to identify business leaders interested in serving on the Workforce Investment Board (WIB) for the Ozark region. Also, become more involved in the activities of both the WIB and Missouri Career Center.
- ✓ *The desired outcomes of these recommendations are to increase the long-term education and skill levels of area employees, as well as reduce the number of underemployed individuals.*

#### How to attract a new workforce to the area

- Participate in the Community Sponsorship Program offered by NationJob Network. NationJob is a leading Internet employee recruitment company currently used by over 200 communities across the nation. This program allows Chamber members to join NationJob at a discounted rate and a portion of the fees will return to the Chamber. NationJob's services include:
  - Unlimited job listings for positions in the community (up to 250 current at anytime).
  - Exposure to the company and jobs through the specialty sites, custom jobs pages and cross posting to other sites.
  - A company profile unlimited in length and scope, so you can "sell" the company to jobs candidates
  - A custom jobs page featuring the company's name, logo and listing of all jobs
  - A detailed profile of the community that attracts not only local candidates, but also those in other areas throughout the nation and world, including spouses looking for employment.
  - A community jobs page, featuring the logos of major investors in the community and all jobs linked from the chamber web site.
  - Additional benefits for centralized recruiting of multi-site employers.
  - Branch plant discounts, giving all branches of the same company discounted program pricing
  - A personal job scout available to applicants looking for certain types of employment, including direct notification by email of job opportunities.
- Develop an awareness of the benefits retirees and older workers can add to the workforce. Because of the aging population and the fact that this region is seen as a retirement area, the number of older workers in the area is significantly increasing. Employers can take advantage of the work ethic and skills of older workers, but must be flexible and innovative regarding work schedules. Also, the positive effects retirees have on an area are significant. Studies show that retirees have three times the economic impact of a typical blue-collar worker and do not place as much of a burden on existing infrastructure such as public schools.

- Consider immigration as an option in attracting new workers to the area. Other cities across the nation have successfully identified groups that match their local employment needs and have been integrated into the community. Portions of our region have experienced a significant immigration of Hispanic workers, and employers have adapted effectively.
- ✓ *The desired outcomes of these recommendations are to increase the quantity of qualified workers able to fill local employment needs. These recommendations are short-term responses to workforce availability.*
- Provide appropriate resources to the priority issue of workforce challenges. Appropriate resources may include a full-time person devoted to implementing these recommendations, as well as that of workforce attraction and development. Other Chambers across the country have devoted staff resources to workforce programs, including marketing and attracting workers to their respective areas. This position may be included as a component of the Chamber's economic development fund campaign.