

# **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT in WNC**

Summary Report and Action Items from the Regional Workforce Summit held April 8, 2008

## **HOSTS:**

Mountain Area Workforce Development Board  
Southwestern Workforce Development Board  
AdvantageWest Economic Development Group  
Partners In Education

## **DEFINITIONS:**

**MAWDB (Mountain Area Workforce Board) = 4 counties**  
Buncombe, Henderson, Madison, and Transylvania, NC  
**SWDB (Southwestern Workforce Development Board) = 7 counties**  
Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Jackson, Haywood, Macon and Swain, NC

## **“Setting the Stage”**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Stakeholders from 11 counties convened to discuss the workforce challenges and business needs in WNC of the healthcare, hospitality/tourism and advanced manufacturing industries. Follow-up plans include: 1). Creating and submitting a white paper of the Summit to the host entities for regional coordination and action plans 2). Conducting 3 cluster follow-up meetings 3). Utilization of information to be released in AdvantageWest's labor shed study.

### **AREA STATISTICS**

Alongside historically steady population growth, WNC posts strong wage and salary employment growth in the MAWDB and SWDB regions with rates above 5 and 10-year averages. Relatively low unemployment rates characterize the MAWDB region, historically below the nation and state. Rates in the SWDB region are similar May-October, but they rise November-April, likely due to hospitality employment seasonality, a potential growth area.

### **GROWTH AREAS/CAREER OPPORTUNITIES**

Major growth areas of healthcare and social assistance as well as accommodation and food services in the MAWDB region account for 40 percent of net new jobs since 2002. The areas of retail trade and construction follow in net employment growth. Construction comprises 25 percent of net growth in the SWDB region since 2002 with a cluster of five sectors each contributing about 10 percent each.

### **SPECIALIZATION**

The value of specialization came up in all sectors. Even the tourism industry named the need, saying that reinventing the product and staying fresh allows it to remain competitive.

### **CHANGING FACE OF MANUFACTURING**

Growth of thousands of jobs characterizes both regions in the last decade, offsetting the loss of jobs in the traditional manufacturing sector.

### **ON THE RISE:**

#### **ADVANCED MANUFACTURING**

Rarely covered in the news is an emerging advanced manufacturing sector, experiencing significant wage gains reflective of a shift towards more highly skilled workers. These industries face workforce shortages as they rely on recruiting workers with specialized skill sets.

### **ENTREPRENEURSHIP RISING**

Self-employed entrepreneurs comprise about 23 percent of total employment in MAWDB region and 25 percent in the SWDB region, higher proportions of self-employed than in the state and nation. The number and proportion of self-employed has risen annually since 2001.

### **AN OLDER WORKFORCE**

From 1996 to 2006, the majority of the net increase in total employment has been in ages over 45, with an 87.8 percent of net workforce increase in that age range for the MAWDB region and a 76.1 percent increase in the SWDB region. Companies may need to be creative and flexible in training, attracting and keeping older workers, finding ways to encourage people of traditional retirement age to keep working but with reduced schedules and responsibilities.

## **RAISING CAREER VISIBILITY TO YOUTH**

Each industry segment at the workforce summit cited a need to engage the Millennial group (current high school students) and younger in learning about career opportunities in our region. With scant funding and time for technical and vocational skills to be taught in school, employers in these segments and others suffer. There is a need to re-establish school-based and work-based experiences, outreach to students and market opportunities in schools.

## **COST OF LIVING**

With the area's cost of living now higher than 12 of 14 major Southeastern cities, attracting and retaining a lower-wage workforce may take finesse and attention. All three workforce sectors represented at the summit emphasized the need for affordable housing, energy, transportation, quality childcare (for 3<sup>rd</sup> shift and weekends, too), healthcare costs and wellness education.

## **COMMON GOALS**

### **TOP PRIORITIES FROM THE REGIONAL WORKFORCE SUMMIT BREAKOUT SESSIONS**

- **CAREER EDUCATION OF K-12 STUDENTS**

Millennial (people born 1980-1994, including current high school students) and younger are the future, and they may be increasingly disconnected from workforce opportunities. We need to work collectively to attract youth to key industries. Schools may have less time and funding for technical and vocational preparation as in the past, and many area jobs do not require a college degree. All sectors stressed the significance of better school partnerships with industry and wanted to better utilize tools already in place such as internship and apprenticeship agreements, but wanted greater access to students for recruitment and education.

- **ATTRACTING AN AGING WORKFORCE**

With a need to fill jobs in advanced manufacturing and other sectors, the importance of not just retaining but attracting an aging workforce grows. An aging area workforce adds to the challenge. Creatively providing opportunities to this age group such as less-demanding schedules, part-time jobs, volunteer opportunities, retraining, etc. will be key to engaging this talent.

- **COST OF LIVING: *HOUSING, ENERGY, CHILDCARE, TRANSPORTION, HEALTH & WELLNESS***

With average housing costs rising in the Asheville Metro area since 2005 and earlier, lack of affordable housing, particularly in Buncombe County, was mentioned as an impediment to obtaining and retaining talent to the area for jobs. Energy, transportation, affordable and high quality childcare, and affordable healthcare and wellness education also came up in all groups.

- **PUBLIC RELATIONS**

Each industry sector reported the need for targeted public relations in specific areas.

- **SOFT SKILLS & LIFE SKILLS**

Future workforce needs to be taught common skills such as how to dress, interview for a job, show up on time, balance a check book, written and oral communication, etc.

## **SUMMIT SPEAKER HIGHLIGHTS**

**TOM TVEIDT, Director, Asheville Metro Business Research Center: separate report**

**SECRETARY JIM FAIN, Secretary of Commerce, North Carolina Department of Commerce: separate report**

## **PHYLLIS EISEN, Executive Director, Center for Workforce Success, Washington D.C.**

Keynote speaker Phyllis Eisen inspired the attendees with her address which dispelled myths about advanced manufacturing and emphasized the significance of emerging technology in advanced manufacturing and its vital place in the viability of local, regional and the nation's economy. She encouraged the community to consider a Center for Workforce Success Dream IT! Do IT! program, a marketing campaign designed to "attract and catch" student interest for specific careers. In order to make manufacturing a preferred career choice by 2010, the Center for Workforce Success has been reaching out to young adults, their parents, educators, their communities, and their policy-makers to change their minds about manufacturing's future and its careers. The campaign forms committed coalitions from local civic, political, education and business entities to launch a focused advertising campaign, create a world-class Web site on the array of highly paid manufacturing jobs, and to form local partnerships with community colleges, technical schools and local universities to respond to the interest in studying for a career in manufacturing. Web site at [Dream It. Do It.](#)

## **BREAKOUT SUMMARIES**

### **HEALTHCARE**

- Fund healthcare programs, educators, facilities and scholarships to support those actively recruited into the profession
- Consolidate existing medical coalitions and redirect focus to what can be solved at the local level
- Collaborations with community college/university systems to offer alternate methods of education
- Health and wellness education (collaborations between Mission and UNC-A)

### **HOSPITALITY/TOURISM**

- Better school partnerships
- Regional public relations programs
- Soft skills and life skills training
- For both regions but particularly for the SWDB region, shoulder season growth November-April

### **ADVANCED MANUFACTURING**

- Training (and retraining) needs for specialized skill sets not always particular to the industry as a whole but to the individualized needs of companies.
- Better communications between industry, education, and service agencies
- Continuing to improve advanced manufacturing certification programs
- Reaching young residents not just post-high school but during high school and much earlier

### **CONSTRUCTION**

A construction industry segment was planned for the summit but was dropped because of lack of participation. The partnership will continue to develop strategies for this industry, such as attracting more—and more specialized—engineers.

## **HEALTHCARE BREAKOUT NOTES**

Healthcare and social assistance account for 40 percent of net new jobs since 2002 in the MAWDB counties. Training and specialization is probably as important in this sector as in advanced manufacturing. The development of the new regional campus of University of North Carolina's medical school in WNC will have a major impact on training in this industry sector. This group looked within to find areas for possible improvement.

### **EDUCATION**

- Educate students at an earlier age (middle school) to healthcare opportunities
- Focus on basic literacy like math and science in grade school to build viable future workforce
- Train healthcare providers for continually developing new technologies
- Retrain and reeducate displaced workers
- Educate and train diverse demographics—males, displaced workers, retirees relocating to the area. Educate students about males working in the nursing field
- Faculty training for staff off-campus at hospitals and industry
- Internships during summer for healthcare careers
- Raise awareness of education assistance funds for training
- Fund healthcare education programs and facilities
- Provide non-traditional instruction: Off-campus, internship, online
- Collaboratively design on-the-job education opportunities for those currently in the industry to earn master's degrees as required by new regulations
- Economic incentives for adequate number of faculty positions
- State should recognize the cost of education of nurses at community college level
- Minimum credential requirements may be a barrier
- Collaborations with community college and university systems to offer flexible scheduling of courses, distance and e-learning alternatives
- Look at programs to retrain adults and supplemental funding
- K-12 resource funding to educate students interested in healthcare careers
- Health and wellness education (collaboration between Mission and UNC-A)
- Need for medical assistants and triage nurses training
- New technology that will require a different kind of training
- Student tours and homeroom visits
- Implementing ergonomic technology
- Implementing wellness

### **WORKFORCE**

- Meet growing demands for healthcare services with qualified and motivated workforce
- Diversity in staffing is important
- Bridge careers by providing attractive opportunities for current healthcare workforce to advance and stay in the industry
- Provide opportunities for current "aging" workforce with less-demanding schedules and responsibilities. Encouraging experienced workforce to remain as part-time or on a volunteer basis. Do not ignore the aging workforce; their experience is valuable
- Provide economic incentive for healthcare professionals leaving direct patient care or other professions to become educators
- Jobs are very portable because of demand
- Focus on entrepreneurial development and support for small businesses in healthcare industry
- Make sure classes are available to support allied health programs for those being recruited

## **WITHIN THE INDUSTRY**

- Look at how providers operate i.e. more hands-on care versus paper work, eliminating non-value items that do not contribute to patient health care in order to give more and better care
- Focus on quality care of patients rather than paperwork. Evaluate complicated processes through the eyes of the patient
- Promote health of current healthcare professionals—non-smoking, focus on ergonomics, etc.
- ITV (instructional television) technology for doctors/patients—distance and in-house

## **PUBLIC RELATIONS**

- Fund a person responsible for making sure students get career information and the great benefits and flexibility and stability of the jobs
- Create an office specifically designed as healthcare outreach, focus on schools, displaced workers, etc.
- Promote what makes healthcare opportunities attractive—different types of patients, a wide variety of opportunities (technology/IT, research, etc.), different areas of practice, flexible schedules, job security, personally satisfying jobs
- Build relationships
- All healthcare professionals should be ambassadors for the industry
- Market healthcare so that it is attractive to the younger generation who are technology-minded
- Focus on WNC issues i.e. workforce issues

## **OTHER**

- Provider of choice; healthcare of choice
- Alternative childcare facilities for employees; alternative healthcare for the aging
- Housing and childcare costs in Asheville are prohibitive to obtaining and retaining talent in the area

## **HOSPITALITY/TOURISM BREAKOUT NOTES**

With over 1900 new jobs in hospitality last year, tourism is now a 1.8 billion dollar industry. With the increasing size of the hospitality industry comes more exposure of visitors to front-line staff, increasing the need for training.

## **RECRUIT & RETAIN**

- Tourism positions high in turnover
- Have to compete with pay and benefits
- Customers lose confidence if they see large and constant turnover
- Owners have to respect their staff
- Partnering with the schools
- School drop-out rate an issue
- Promote from within
- Candidates need soft skills for the interviewing process
- Third life approach: what else do we want to be in this third life? Goes to aging population
- Wanted: Good employers who offer creative benefits to solve problems. Examples: Bus passes, holidays, stock ownership with longevity, daycare discount, quarterly bonuses, and medical (have weekly doctor to offer free advice), creative challenges with rewards and offering leadership roles
- Employees have a hard time being productive when they have financial struggles

## **SOFT SKILLS & LIFE SKILLS TRAINING**

- Meeting consumer expectations examples: desire to be one step ahead of a guest, have eye contact, and lead instead of point to a location
- Understanding the 5-star mentality and ability to step right into a 4- or 5-star position
- Education needs to be first class
- Must offer flexibility and add more technology
- First impressions are important
- Image providers – front line staff who answer the phone or hostess and first impressions are important

## **EDUCATION**

- Build talent level
- Work more closely with A-B Tech, UNC-A and high school programs
- Encourage professional continuing education
- On-the-job training
- Internships, job shadowing and mentoring talent
- Emphasize soft and life skills
- Dispelling hospitality myths (wages and opportunity)
- Moving into management
- Talk about career paths
- Thought of as a starter industry but career wait staff
- Nobody tells you that you have potential for something else
- Try to instill creativity
- Articulate variety and diversity of workforce opportunities
- Better communicate benefits both monetary and other
- Set clear expectations of career pathways
- School-to-work money is not available but was good for hospitality

## **REGIONAL PUBLIC RELATIONS**

- Low-paying; myths about position salaries and that tourism is not sustainable
- Recognition of industry and importance to area—dispelling perceptions that staff such as waiters are valuable members of the workforce and some make a lot of money
- Reinventing products & opportunities
- Both Asheville and Biltmore visitors coming here; keep public opinions positive; got to keep people engaged and stimulated

## **WAGES & LIFESTYLE**

- Housing/daycare/transportation crises
- Affordable health insurance?
- Inventory needs and develop new creative solutions
- GPI offers a bus program
- Biltmore is working on making housing more affordable (list)
- Proposal to have matching funds and have apartments for rent and that are provided
- Affordable housing is needed in convenient commuting locations

## **OTHER**

- Environmental stewardship
- Immigration

## **ADVANCED MANUFACTURING BREAKOUT NOTES**

The success of the advanced manufacturing sector is completely reliant on the region's ability to recruit, train and retain a quality workforce. Collaborating on these common issues to find solutions is vital for the future since the workforce issue crosses county lines and needs to be tackled collectively. The new face of advanced manufacturing requires a highly skilled workforce and employers, educators economic developers, workforce development boards and the media need to work to change the perception that manufacturing is a dead-end career.

### **WORKFORCE**

- Engage students, get involved in outreach efforts aimed towards younger students
- Need to find ways of finding appropriate training that will move available people into available jobs as we need more employees
- Smaller, faster, higher skills needed but more rewards available
- Upgrade employee skills sets, increasing number of candidates for employment
- Manufacturers are in competition for employees in the healthcare and tourism sectors
- The Manufacturers Skill Gap Workgroup, meeting for a year, has a goal: updating, streamlining and delivering advanced manufacturing preparation courses through the community colleges. The old course program was long and focused on older skills sets. The new, shorter program (Advanced manufacturing Preparation) focuses on critical thinking, technological interfaces, OSHA training. A-B Tech and Blue Ridge Community College are onboard with this updated course
- Unemployment for Henderson and Buncombe counties are among the lowest in the state and there is competition for the highest level of talent
- What about a program to encourage children of current employees to enter advanced manufacturing?; think about incentives and ways to promote these careers. Ex: open plants to tours so employees can bring families/young adults

### **RETRAINING & UPDATING WORKER SKILLS**

- Workers with necessary skills are needed to fill positions; continuous updates are key
- Stronger skills sets, ability to multi-task and move quickly
- Retraining through the community colleges is working to transition dislocated workers to transition to other jobs. Can we get people trained in a few weeks instead of two years?
- The prep programs through community colleges are necessary to help businesses remain viable and train up-and-coming workers
- Have community colleges customize courses based on industry needs
- Incorporate critical thinking and work ethics in early curriculum—don't wait until community college

### **PUBLIC RELATIONS**

- Maybe calling it advanced manufacturing makes it more viable and is more accurate
- Need to get the word out that advanced manufacturing provides economic stability
- Raise awareness and perceptions about advanced manufacturing amongst our youth. Example: student attendance at employer career fairs such as the recent one sponsored by the Citizen-Times. Students can talk to employers and vice versa. Advanced manufacturers have the opportunity to speak to students to let them know that advanced manufacturing provides good wages, etc.
- Many companies have saved through attrition. There are fewer positions but they are more productive due to new technologies and thus the salaries are higher
- Celebrate successes – publicize and emphasize successes of young students
- Bring families of all kinds into advanced manufacturing environment
- Dispelling negative perceptions of advanced manufacturing as a careers
- Problem: Dislocated workers do not want to go back into advanced manufacturing

## **EDUCATION**

- Need for community colleges to customize courses based on industry needs
- Public schools incorporate critical thinking, how to behave and work ethics into curriculum
- Increased emphasis on NC Department of Labor apprenticeship training program. Example: The Apprenticeship Leads program through the N.C. Dept. of Labor. Students work half-days during their senior year doing the apprenticeship. The outcome is free college and a paycheck, plus a nationally-recognized, portable credential (journeyman level)
- Gaining more access to schools for career awareness
- Outreach to middle schools to promote career exploration at an earlier age
- Involve public school educators from the ground up
- Offer tech courses earlier to try to engage students
- Junior achievement a fruitful way to encourage and engage youth in careers in advanced manufacturing
- Continue to involve guidance counselors by introducing to the advanced manufacturing environment so they can take that knowledge back to the students
- Need for educators to remember the importance and satisfaction of making something, such as in advanced manufacturing. Artistic abilities and skills are needed in advanced manufacturing
- Way to communicate events like career fair to people interested? Businesses want to be involved but need a way to find out and take action
- Four year degree is not for everyone and advanced manufacturing is a good option for some
- Apprenticeship programs are a great way to collaborate. Example: AlphaTech, Inc. promoted such a program in collaboration with HCPS to involve young people who have an interest in working with their hands. Bring students on in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, pay them if they continue on in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade and the company pays for them to go to Blue Ridge Community College after that
- Try hard to match students with jobs that they actually like

## **REGIONAL COLLABORATION**

- Great ideas but no consolidated efforts—need to bring resources together
- Update resources so industry knows what's available in their region
- Collaborations need to promote sustainability
- Reductions in funding are having a detrimental effect on schools' ability to provide Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses
- Advanced manufacturing community needs to act like a community. Involvement is imperative

## **OTHER**

- Work with current workforce to address housing needs, transportation, etc.
- Global markets – global standards of quality
- AdvantageWest and the NC Department of Labor are excellent resources

## **REGIONAL WORKFORCE SUMMIT SPONSORS**

AdvantageWest Economic Development Group  
Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce  
AT&T North Carolina  
Buncombe County  
Haywood Advancement Foundation  
Henderson County Partnership for Economic  
Development

Mission Hospitals  
Mountain Area Workforce Development Board  
(Region A)  
Progress Energy  
Southwestern Commission (Region B)  
WCI, Inc. (Western Carolina Industries)

## **REGIONAL WORKFORCE PARTICIPANTS**

The inaugural Regional Workforce Summit had 280 attendees with the following breakdown of representation:

- Advanced Manufacturing = 105
- Healthcare = 33
- Tourism/Hospitality = 37

(Other attendees floated throughout the sessions and are not included in the breakout figures)

- 5 Public School Systems and 8 Post Secondary Institutions attended.
- 63 companies participated with 85 attendees representing private industry.
- 10 Non-Profits (Includes Mission Hospitals, CarePartners, ABCCM, United Way, etc.)
- 3 Trade Associations: Society of the Plastics Industry, Manufacturing and Technology Institute (South Carolina) and Phyllis Eisen from National Association of Manufacturing