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Technical schools key to workforce development

The definitions of economic development, community development, and workforce development are sometimes each misunderstood, but they are all interrelated. It is my intention in my recent articles to help inform my readers specifically about workforce development. I'd like to credit William Wainwright, M. Ed., Regional Director of Northshore Technical Colleges, whom I met with this week, for sharing relevant information for today's message. With the current state of the Louisiana and national economies, our chamber continues to work with our members who demand and depend upon well prepared and trained employees for the success of their business.

Northshore Technical College has provided relevant workforce training in St. Tammany, Washington, Tangipahoa, St. Helena and Livingston Parishes since 1930. They have a long standing tradition of providing high demand workforce training for local and regional employers. National trends indicate increased enrollments in community and technical colleges throughout the country—four year universities are not for every high school graduate or adult student re-entering the workforce. Skills enhancements and advanced technical training for those seeking career changes provide opportunities for individuals to rebuild lives as well as the overall economy.

Central to the mission of Northshore Technical College is the ability to rapidly respond to training needs following disasters such as Katrina as well as recent oil response training. NTC provided oil response training to 540 participants centered on personal safety and health training for one time only petroleum clean-up workers removing weathered oil specific for the BP MS Canyon 252 response. The Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS) in total served over 6,000 participants. This is a most impressive statistic for our LCTCS!

While disaster recovery is critical, planning for emerging technologies in the northshore region is just as important. Recent curriculum development efforts in partnership with Southeastern Louisiana University and economic development agencies has led to training opportunities available in green technologies such as building analysis, weatherization, RESNET Rater, and energy efficiency. In addition, partnerships with high schools provide career pathways for students interested in emerging green technologies.

Northshore Technical College and St. Tammany Parish Schools continue to lead advanced workforce training initiatives in construction, transportation, healthcare, and hospitality industry sectors. Over 600 students in St. Tammany public schools dually enrolled with Northshore Technical College last year alone and efforts to grow such programs continue. Participating students graduate with advanced training and certification in high demand jobs in addition to a high school diploma creating an exploratory process for making informed career training decisions.

Northshore Technical College is now providing adult education services in St. Tammany. With the passage of legislation recently sponsored by Senator Jack Donahue, adult education was transitioned from the Department of Education to the LCTCS. Changes in adult education services include comprehensive career counseling, Work Keys certification and industry-based certifications in addition to GED attainment. This effort will provide participants marketable skills necessary for successful employment in today's workplace.

Explosive growth in Louisiana's community and technical colleges continues with over 70,000 students currently enrolled. Employees are among a business' greatest assets. Now more than ever, comprehensive efforts between chambers of commerce, economic development agencies, and post-secondary systems are critical to building a stronger Louisiana workforce. That is why our chamber counts workforce development among out top priorities, and will continue to work with our partners to ensure the message from the LCTCS gets out.

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