

Career Builders

By Mary-Alane Wiltse

Tooting our own Horn

Last week the Workforce Investment Board (WIB) of Columbia & Greene Counties officially received an incentive award from the New York State Department of Labor in the amount of \$184,114. This award is provided to local areas when they exceed the 17 performance measures the federal law which mandates our services requires. This is the second consecutive year that the Columbia-Greene area has qualified for this extra money, and we are only one of three areas amongst the 33 that exist across the state that can boast about this accomplishment. So, we are.

The seventeen measures by which we are judged are quite technical and if I listed them all you would be able to tell that they were developed by the federal government. Basically, they are all related to employment, training and wage outcomes for the four different groups of people we serve. These groups are defined as adults, dislocated workers, youth between the ages of 14 and 18, and youth between the ages of 19 and 21.

During the time frame on which this award is based, we helped 1,162 unemployed workers in our two counties find jobs. Close to 300 of these individuals received intensive services or occupational training, giving us an overall job placement rate of 81.8%. The percent of individuals that were still employed between six and nine months later equaled 87.9%. The average replacement wage for dislocated workers came in at \$264 above their previous earnings and the earnings increase for adults averaged \$3,374.

In addition, 100 people received full tuition assistance for training in demand occupations. We helped people obtain college associate degrees as computer technicians, registered nurses, auto mechanics, accounting assistants, and human service workers. We helped people receive training as commercial truck drivers, licensed practical nurses, certified nurse's aides, and welders.

The WIB also contracted with the New Lebanon Central School District in Columbia County and the Greenville School District in Greene County to provide after-school career exploration and school-to-work activities for 22 eligible youth, helping them stay in school and reaching the required skill-attainment rate at an 82.3% level.

The majority of youth funds were focused on assisting high school drop-outs in obtaining their GED, finding employment or enrolling in a post-secondary education program. These services were offered by the Catskill Central School District and Columbia-Greene Community College's Office of Community Services. Over 50 students received their equivalency diploma through these efforts. Those youth that went to work or enrolled in college had a six month retention rate that exceeded our standards by over 30%.

Although we are not officially judged on our services to business we are also proud of the assistance we have been able to provide our local companies. For example, close to 300 local businesses utilized the New York State Job Bank to list 1,709 job orders during our last program year. We also sponsored spring and fall Job Fairs that attracted close to 60 businesses each, and between 350 and 450 job seekers.

In addition, we were able to help 14 companies access local and state training funds to upgrade the skills of their newly hired and current employees. Over \$270,000 was granted for training that was provided in a variety of formats and in a wide range of skills. We were able to reimburse wage costs for employers providing on-the-job training to newly hired or promoted workers. We assisted companies in funding instruction for their employees on lean manufacturing concepts; or on learning industry specific computer software packages. Supervisory skills training was offered for newly promoted managers and training for industry specific certifications for employees was also reimbursed. Finally, over 60 newly hired workers from local companies attended our Employee Enhancement Program, which provides instruction in business-social skills to help increase productivity and employee retention.

We had a good year. The additional funds we just received will help us maintain the same level of quality service to our community during this next year. Did I brag just enough?

Mary-Alane Wiltse is the Director of the Workforce New York Career Center at Columbia-Greene Community College. For more information visit the website at www.columbiagreeneetworks.org, call 828-4181 ext. 5510, or visit them at their new home on the top floor of the Professional Academic Center on the college campus.