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Program prepares youths for careers

BY KIMM R. MONTONE

STAFF WRITER

kmontone@republicanherald.com

Some of Schuylkill County's business and community leaders are promoting a program to train young adults for the job market.

Darlene Robbins, president of the Northeast PA Manufacturers and Employers Association, endorsed the Your Employability Skills, or YES, program as a way to prepare high school students and adults for new careers.

During a news conference Thursday at the River Inn, Robbins said the program will help attract potential employers and create more employment opportunities for Schuylkill County residents.

The certificate program's objective is to teach high school students and unemployed adults skills such as communication, teamwork and technology use.

"Economic development can flourish in our county. The Your Employability Skills program teaches skills specific to the workforce. It hits on all the building blocks it takes to be a good employee," Robbins said. "Students that enroll in the program are telling us they're serious about getting a job in the workforce ... They're going through testing, they're going through attendance requirement, 95 percent attendance requirement, and then they're going through a drug test, a six-panel drug test."

The program started in York County in 1996 as an adult training program address the lack of qualified job applicants in a wide range of industries. The Dallastown Area High School, York County, was the first to adopt the program in 2002.

County Commissioner Robert S. Carl Jr., a Republican, said having a trained workforce will allow local leaders to attract more employers.

"All we're trying to do and the commitment is to make sure our workforce is prepared so we can bring and continue to bring good-paying jobs," he said.

Robert S. Kellerman, a YES program founder, asked the audience at Thursday's conference to introduce the program in all the county schools and target adults.

"... It's a community program for health care, insurance, banking, construction, auto and by-the-way manufacturing," Kellerman said.

In Schuylkill County, Schuylkill Haven Area High School participated in the program and paid via a grant from the state through state Rep. Bob Allen, R-125.

Robert Boyle, a business and computer teacher at Schuylkill Haven, works with about 15 high school students in the program.

"... Kids can sit in English class or math class and maybe you have said it at one point, 'when and where am I going to use this,' " Boyle said. "We talk about skills they're going to use."

Among the 15 members attending Thursday's conference were state lawmakers, county officials, education professionals and representatives from the program.

Local legislators recommended the program, including Allen.

“As chairman of the labor committee. I’ve seen many programs and bills come before the House labor committee. This program I think is the most superior one in the state,” Allen said. “... We’re down roughly to 5.6 or (5).7 percent (unemployment rate). My feeling is that 2 to 3 percent that fall into that category are unskilled and unemployable because they haven’t been able to make the transition from one area to another.”

Allen was joined by state Reps. David G. Argall, R-124, and Neal P. Goodman, D-123, and legislative aide Clyde C. “Champ” Holman, on behalf of state Sen. James J. Rhoades, R-29.

Robbins introduced the pre-employment training and accreditation program during a seminar in February.

The program has so far received the backing of the manufacturers and employers association, Pennsylvania Career Link, The Schuylkill Chamber of Commerce, PPL Electric Utilities Corp., the county commissioners, the Schuylkill County Economic Development Corp., Schuylkill Intermediate Unit No. 29 and Schuylkill Workforce Partnership.

There’s a one-time site fee of \$5,000 for the program materials.