

Officials: Good jobs available in skilled labor



David Hamaty, left, vice president of human resources at North American Hoganas in Hollsopple, talks to students and parents about job opportunities with his company during the Polytechnic Career Awareness Event Tuesday at Richland High School. Staff photo by Dylan Johnson

Posted: Tuesday, March 15, 2016 10:45 pm

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A gap is appearing in the national workforce. Thousands of well-paying jobs with railroads, steel mills and hospitals are going unfilled throughout the area, according to officials.

The Challenge Program held its first Polytechnic Career Awareness Event at Richland High School Tuesday to address the stigma about these jobs.

Sara Deyarmin, manager of program development, said the event was designed to change the minds of parents and students about careers and trades.

"If we don't alert students to these opportunities . . . they feel like they'll have to leave," she said. "We need to help guide our students toward those degrees to grow our local economy."

About 50 students signed up for the event for a networking session with 12 local businesses to learn about careers in welding, nursing and manufacturing.

Deyarmin said these jobs may require only an associate degree or trade school and pay much more than many jobs that require bachelor's degrees.

Ed Legge, with the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis for the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry, gave many statistics about these unfilled jobs during the event.

He said the top employing fields in the Southern Alleghenies region include health care, retail and

manufacturing.

By far, the most in-demand job in the area is registered nurse. Legge attributed this to Pennsylvania's aging population, which he said is second only to Florida.

Although Legge admitted that a higher degree generally equals higher pay, he said that higher education is often so expensive that the cost outweighs the reward.

Of the businesses that attended the event, railroad business Norfolk Southern was one of the larger companies. Office manager Jenny Musto said Norfolk Southern has jobs for machinists, electricians, welders and engineers.

"We get a pretty good turnout when we advertise for positions," she said.

Norfolk Southern has some on-the-job training and other jobs that require bachelor's degrees.

David Hamaty, vice president of human resources at North American Hoganas in Hollsopple, said there are jobs available in his company's production facility.

"In both facilities in Johnstown and Hollsopple, we have very low turnover because of the rates we pay people and how we treat them," he said.

Hamaty said it is difficult to find people with the proper skill sets and experience with hands-on manufacturing.

Trade school and community college officials also attended the event to show students a path to the careers advertised at the event.

Lynn Clement, assistant administrator at the Somerset County Technology Center, said it is important to change the conversation about post-secondary education.

"We need to change the message we tell students and parents as young as elementary school," she said. "We need to start asking them what they want to do and work with them in the most cost-effective, beneficial way to their education."

Clement said, as a parent, she doesn't want her children going to a four-year college to be forced into a job that has nothing to do with their majors.

"We're seeing that discussion shift," she said. "People did go to school for four years ... and depending on what you want to do, you may not need a four-year degree. It's catching on."

Karen Remick, the technology center's administrative director, said that research is showing that the job outlook in the next five to seven years is leaning toward skilled labor careers requiring two-year degrees.

- Yes
- No
- No opinion