

High-Wage Jobs Are Out There

*What does it take to qualify,
and how is the region preparing workers?*

BY LAURIE WINK

Northwest Indiana's economic development is closely aligned with availability of a qualified, motivated workforce. Success is a matter of fitting the right people into the right slots. But as anyone knows who's tried to complete a complex jigsaw puzzle, you have to keep the overall picture in mind as you identify where each piece fits. The process takes vision, commitment and time.

The Center of Workforce Innovations (CWI), headed by Linda Woloshansky, is working with leading employers and educators in the seven-county Northwest Indiana region to pinpoint jobs that are in demand and to put training programs in place to prepare people to fill them. "Workforce development has become the number one priority for economic development across the country," she says.

Five primary economic engines fuel Northwest Indiana's economy: manufacturing; transportation and distribution; health care; construction; and professional services. Jobs in these sectors require skilled training, ranging from certificate programs to college degrees, and can pay \$40,000 or more a year.

CWI is working with four key groups to achieve a common goal: 60 percent or more of the workforce will have some postsecondary education in areas that are aligned with employers' needs by 2025.

FILLING THE EMPLOYEE PIPELINE

The Regional Education/Employer Alliance for Developing Youth (READY) NWI is a grassroots initiative that emerged from CWI's conversations with business owners. "They



HOT JOB PROSPECTS The Steelworker for the Future program includes onsite training at ArcelorMittal.

kept saying the pipeline isn't where it needs to be," says Woloshansky. "Candidates aren't appropriate for the jobs. At the same time, (school) superintendents didn't know about the available jobs. They bought the myth that there were no opportunities for kids in Northwest Indiana."

Don Babcock, director of economic development for NIPSCO, says READY NWI is getting young people ready for college, ready for careers and ready to meet the demands of a globally competitive marketplace.

"We want to get young people believing and dreaming about having a great life in Northwest Indiana," Babcock says. "We want them to know they can make it here. They can make things of value and create a valuable life."

READY NWI's K-12 team is identifying changes that will better prepare kids for college and careers. Efforts are under way to encourage students to stay in school, earn college credits while taking high school classes and take advantage of internships with prospective employers. Woloshansky says, "They're breaking down barri-

ers that keep kids from being successful in postsecondary education."

A series of 19 videos on companies throughout the region is informing counselors, parents, teachers and students about employment opportunities. Each video showcases a company's culture, the types of jobs available and what it takes to be successful.

Last summer, READY NWI hosted 100 teachers and counselors at a Counselor Academy in Valparaiso. Babcock says it was an important step in bringing school counselors up to speed about today's hot careers.

"The average counselor has 500 to 600 students to counsel," he says. "It's very difficult for them to portray what's out there in an ever-changing workplace."

READY NWI's business team helps young people develop work readiness skills. These so-called "soft skills" include dependability, arriving on time, dressing appropriately and following instructions. According to Woloshansky, most people lose jobs because they don't have these skills. "If you can instill those (skills) in

high school students, it will lead to better attitudes and better employment opportunities," she says.

PREPARING PATHWAYS TO WORKPLACE SUCCESS

The Region 1 Works Council promotes Career and Technical Education (CTE) as a pathway to good jobs and makes sure CTE programs line up with employer needs. Kris Emaus, chair of the Region 1 Work Council, says career education is a powerful tool to fight against unemployment and poverty.

"Our students need to know more about the available options and the skills, knowledge and abilities required to achieve their goals," Emaus says. "Too often students flounder, not knowing what to do with their lives. Our goal is to work with local educators to provide opportunities for students to discover their passion and develop clear plans to help them achieve their goals."

The Works Council held a Career Pathways event last fall that attracted 150 counselors and teachers, Emaus says. The event featured Matt Fleck, a national expert on career pathways, and panel discussions by employers with career opportunities. Current and former CTE students and their parents talked about how they'd benefited from technical skills training.

"An employer in the room actually offered a job to a senior CTE student based on the presentation the student made that evening," Emaus says.

Educators from schools throughout Northwest Indiana have toured construction, skilled trades and health care facilities for a firsthand look at high-skill positions. Recent facility tours showcased opportunities in engineering, computer and hospitality fields.

This summer, the Works Council is funding eight Career Awareness Camps for eighth- and ninth-graders at CTE centers in Hammond, East Chicago, Gary, Michigan City and Porter County, plus Purdue University Calumet's Center of Innovation,

Visualization and Simulation (CIVS). During the weeklong camps, students will tour companies and find out about postsecondary education programs.

Emaus says, "We want a unique and personal experience for each camper, so we've targeted 20 students per camp."

FINE-TUNING THE LABOR MARKET

The Northwest Indiana Workforce Board (NWIWB) is made up of leaders in business, education, labor, faith-based organizations, communities and economic development representing the region's seven counties. The NWIWB oversees WorkOne offices, where staff members help unemployed and underemployed workers identifying their marketable skills and match them with needs in the current labor market. Training funds are available through WorkOne for those who need to build new skill sets and competencies, according to George Douglas, NWIWB vice president.

"It's a tremendous resource that a lot of people are not aware of," Douglas says. "People are working two and three part-time minimum wage jobs to stay above the poverty line when they aspire to working one job."

Douglas says the health care industry is hiring people for medical

billing and coding, pharmacy technicians, and licensed practical nurses. Manufacturers are looking for workers with CNC lathing skills to fill jobs that can pay \$70,000 to \$100,000 a year, according to Douglas.

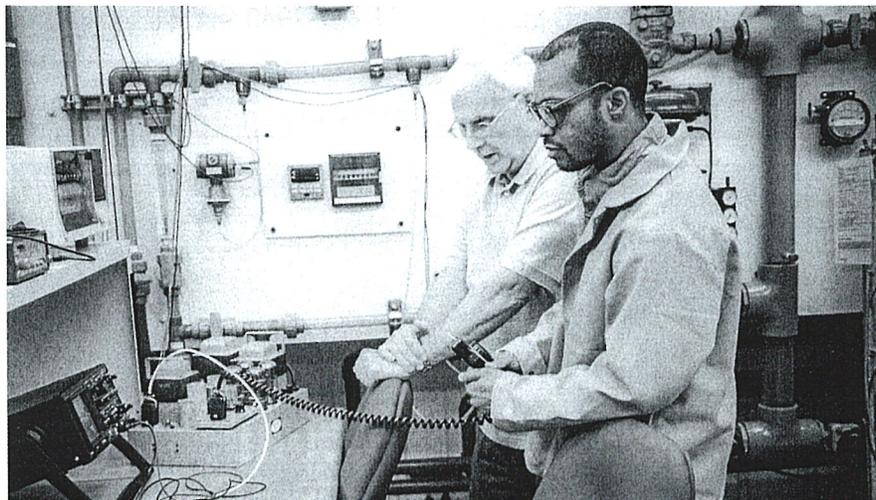
Transportation, distribution and logistics, or TDL, is another high-demand area. As CEO of Indiana Beverage in Valparaiso, Douglas knows firsthand about the need for well-trained drivers. He says young people often don't view trucking as a desirable career option.

"Most people think of it as driving across country, but a lot has changed in the industry," Douglas says. "We create a job structure where they're home every night. And wages have come up as government regulations have increased."

Drivers with a Class A commercial driver's license (CDL) and employability skills typically earn \$15 to \$25 an hour. Indiana Beverage trains its own drivers to qualify for a CDL. "We teach them the technical aspects but, more than a CDL, they need customer service training and other intangibles," Douglas says.

The NWIWB has produced a poster series to inform job candidates about traits employers look for during interviews, such as a neat appearance, eye contact and firm handshake.

"These soft skills can really make a difference for people walking in the



JOB OFFER Steelworker for the Future graduates are offered jobs, based on the need for maintenance and electrical technicians at the time they graduate.

door," Douglas says. "You can't just rely on a resume."

EARNING WHILE LEARNING

ArcelorMittal has created a signature associate's degree program to train a new generation of steelworkers. Steelworker for the Future started in Northwest Indiana in 2008 and is now offered in five states where ArcelorMittal has a strong presence, according to

R.D. Parpart, program head.

Candidates for Steelworker for the Future need a high school diploma and must pass a college entrance exam and a drug screen. In Northwest Indiana, students can enroll in Purdue University North Central or in Ivy Tech's branches in Valparaiso, East Chicago or Gary. Upon completion, they receive an associate's degree in applied sciences as either a mechanical or electrical technician.

Parpart says full-time students complete the academic requirements in two years and participate in 16 weeks of on-site training at ArcelorMittal. While training, students earn credits toward their degree and earn wages to pay for education costs. After completing Steelworker for the Future and passing the craft entrance exam, graduates are offered a job, based on the need for maintenance and electrical technicians at the time they graduate.

"They start at \$20 an hour and, after three years, could be earning \$90,000 a year if they work an additional eight hours of overtime a week," he says. ArcelorMittal employees receive attractive vacation benefits, a 401(k) plan and profit sharing.

Today's steel industry is a highly automated, high-tech operation that runs 24 hours a day, seven days a week year-round. ArcelorMittal employs 20,000 workers at 28 facilities throughout the United States, and half of them work in Northwest Indiana. The company needs 200 highly trained mechanical technicians per year for the next five years, Parpart says, and the demand is even greater for electrical technicians, a field that is "growing by leaps and bounds."

He recruits for Steelworker for the Future in middle schools and high schools and says that, often, parents and school staff are more surprised than students to find out about the high-wage, high-demand opportunities in the steel industry.

"They remember downturns in the economy and the steel industry, and think we're always laying off people," Parpart says. "While we have downsized over the past several decades, we're still in desperate need of skilled workers. That's the keyword: 'skilled.'"

CWI and its partners have 10 years to put the puzzle pieces together that will align the skills of a majority of Northwest Indiana adults with the needs of employers. They clearly have the vision and commitment to get the job done. The result will be a vibrant economy and a quality life for the region's residents. 



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