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WORK MATTERS

Workforce Crisis Task Force puts response plan in action

DEAN SCHAMORE Jan 31, 2018 Updated 3 hrs ago

Kentucky is enjoying economic growth and the state continues to be home to successful, established businesses and a hub for emerging entrepreneurs and start-ups.

The opportunities for Kentucky and the Lincoln Trail region are limitless, but the constraints on realizing those opportunities are real. Specifically, we face a workforce shortage, in part because of this economic growth in so many sectors.

Failing to mobilize the workers we have and connecting them to the jobs of the region today and as anticipated in the future is the key to our region's continued health and vitality.

For this reason, local leaders in business, economic development and education, along with social services providers, are joining forces to address the problem through a new Workforce Crisis Task Force. It is the result of the Lincoln Trail Workforce Development Board's strategic plan, developed in partnership with workforce development experts Massachusetts-based Strategy Matters.

The task force is doing its job through three active groups, each tackling a different opportunity to increase the number of local residents working in our regional businesses.

TODAY'S BUSINESSES. This group is looking at ways our region can grow business investment in our workforce. Members are focusing on how to best attract and retain workers across many sectors. Groups of employers throughout the Lincoln Trail region, including Breckinridge, Grayson, Hardin, LaRue, Marion, Meade, Nelson and Washington counties, are meeting to identify solutions to their worker shortages and implement them collaboratively.

Involving the business community in this effort is critical. As we implement our strategic plan to increase workforce participation, we must know about the talent needs and challenges of our businesses — large and small and from all sectors.

TODAY'S AVAILABLE WORKFORCE. This group is working with adults who face barriers to employment. There are too many people in our region who, for a variety of reasons, are on the bench, so to speak. We need to find ways to get them in the game.

Through a partnership with United Way of Central Kentucky's Way to Work, this group is connecting adults who are out of work with jobs and supporting their success through assistance with transportation, child care and other obstacles.

WORKFORCE OF TOMORROW. This group is focused on unlocking local potential — our students. We are working to create new school-to-work programs in the form of apprenticeships, internships and other vehicles to make local jobs more attractive and accessible to our soon-to-be adults.

Our goal is not only to better prepare our students for the jobs available right here in our region, but also to help ensure younger workers choose to live and work here and contribute to our communities.

Every resident of this region is affected in some way by our workforce shortage crisis. It is imperative for the economic prosperity of this region that we collaboratively and creatively find ways to get more people in our workforce.

I encourage you to get involved with one of our three groups now. To join the effort, email Sherry Johnson, associate director at Lincoln Trail Area Development District, at sherry@ltadd.org.

State Rep. Dean Schamore is a business owner and chairman of the Lincoln Trail Workforce Development Board. He can be reached at dean.schamore@webdplus.com.

