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BST Member Spotlight—Economic Development

By Michelle Bisbing,

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Each edition of our Newsletter will feature information on one of our BST partner agencies. In this edition, we feature the Pocono Mountains Economic Development Corporation (PMEDC).

PMEDC is a non-profit economic development organization responsible for generating new tax base and creating jobs in Monroe County. Funded primarily by the Monroe County Commissioners, our mission is to attract and retain industry, develop business parks, market the county and available real estate to prospects, improve infrastructure to support economic development and business financing for projects.

We have an eleven member Board of Directors and four staff members. PMEDC also owns and operates three sewage treatment facilities that provide services to companies in our business parks. Some examples of our projects include: Pocono Mountains Corporate Center East & South, Arcadia North Business Park, Johnson & Johnson Sales & Logistics Company LLC, WalMart DC 6080, Vigon International, Penn Regional Business Center, Coolbaugh Township Sewage Project and Pocono Township/Brodhead Creek Regional Authority Sewage Project.

In addition to projects in Monroe County, PMEDC is also active in the region and statewide. We are members of Penn's Northeast, a regional economic development marketing organization which provides us an avenue to attract more prospects and have access to the benefits of a larger marketing program. We are involved in the nine-county regional effort for Wall Street West and partner with the Northeast PA Alliance on business financing and international business development. Our executive director serves on the Pocono Counties Workforce Investment Board, the PA Economic Development Association Board and the Team Pennsylvania Foundation Board.

We can be reached at (570) 839-1992. Visit www.pmedc.com for additional information.

“OJT allows the employer to train the employee on the job and get reimbursed 50% of the hourly wage.”

Ms. Bisbing has been the Director of Marketing for PMEDC for the past 7 years. Before coming to PMEDC, Ms. Bisbing spent 14 years in workforce development with Monroe County Job Training and Monroe County CareerLink. As Director of Marketing, she is responsible for new business attraction, business outreach and retention, local and regional marketing initiatives and data management. She has a BA in Political Science and Journalism and currently holds certifications as a Workforce Development Professional and the Pennsylvania Economic Development Association.

For local news and happenings, see page 4.

Federal Funding Cuts Injure Workforce Initiatives

Pennsylvania is facing a \$14 million reduction in its Workforce Development Initiatives due to Federal budget cuts. In addition, the USDOL told the State that it would have to **give back another \$5 million from this year's budget**, according to Pennsylvania Partners, a group that represents State Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) and workforce-development professionals. This \$5 million is money that was allocated for workforce training and other initiatives.

The 2008-09 fiscal year begins on July 1st and local WIBs will have to find ways to deal with the drastic cuts. **This could lead to fewer services available to workers.** And, this couldn't come at a worse time now that unemployment is rising and the economy in general is not good.

"Employers and job seekers in PA should be very concerned about what this all means for them. Without money to support Workforce Development initiatives, workers will not be trained with the necessary skills they need to make them, and the businesses they work for, successful."

State workforce offices receive Federal money under a 1933 law, the **Wagner-Peyser Act**, establishing national employment programs. In 1998, the **Workforce Investment Act** was passed establishing a One-Stop employment services delivery system. **The PA CareerLink system was established as a result** of the 1998 act. However, these budget cuts severely hamper the amount of services that can be offered to employers and job seekers. CareerLink offices use this money to support Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) so workers can upgrade and learn new skills.

More cuts are proposed for next year. The **Bush administration budget proposes to eliminate one funding stream altogether—the Wagner-Peyser Act.** Without this funding, **Workforce Development would be crippled** without the money needed to pay the salaries of workforce professionals who make services to employers and job seekers possible.

Employers and job seekers in Pennsylvania **should be very concerned** about what this all means for them. Without money to support Workforce Development initiatives, **workers will not be trained with the necessary skills needed to make them, and the business they work for, successful.** Ultimately, it is Congress who has the final say on deciding how the nation will spend its money. We hope that in the upcoming weeks and months they will consider the importance of workforce development programs and decide to increase commitment and funding to these programs.

Information for this article was taken from the Central Penn Business Journal. "Federal funding cuts, recalls injure workforce initiatives" (5/16/08), Jim T. Ryan and "Cuts to workforce budgets hinder businesses, other groups" (5/23/08), Jim T. Ryan.



After this article was written, it was announced that the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Resources, Education, and Related Agencies rejected the proposed funding cuts and proposed the USDOL's 2009 budget **increase** funding for Wagner-Peyser, WIA, Dislocated Workers, and State Unemployment Insurance Operations. We hope the efforts are successful, but as the bill moves to full committee markup, it is uncertain if the increases will be maintained.

Education—The Key to Workforce Development?

There's been a struggle occurring in the Poconos for some time now. Employers say they can't find qualified people to fill vacant positions. Job seekers say they can't afford to work for the wage being offered for those positions. In the Pocono Business Journal (June 2008, page 8), **a conclusion on wages in the Poconos was made by ESU students:** "...We feel that the Poconos are not paying adequate wages to some workers. Due to the higher cost of living in the Poconos, people who live and work in the area need more income to live comfortably. Our research supported that the highest wages, when compared with the cost of living, can be found in the Lehigh Valley (which) has a lower average cost of living and pays entry level police officers, experienced nurses, accountants, general managers and maintenance workers higher wages [than the Pocono Counties]. A solution for those living in the Pocono area who would like to make more money but continue living in the area (is they) can choose to commute to the Lehigh Valley."

The **'brain drain' syndrome** of the Poconos states that bright, young people are graduating from college and moving elsewhere because **the Poconos doesn't pay good enough wages**. But, **what is the key to "good wages"?** If you ask Joe Merlino, Industry and Business analyst for the Department of Labor & Industry in Harrisburg, he would say: "You're not going to get a sustainable wage until you get a workforce that's trained to earn it". And, if you were to ask Joseph Sebelin, Executive Director of Pocono Counties Workforce Investment Area, he would say: "The big concern of any company coming into our area is, 'Are you going to have a trained workforce'. **It's economic development, workforce development and the missing link: education.**"

As far as educational institutions to train the workforce pipeline in the Poconos, there is only handful (as compared to surrounding areas, such as the Lehigh Valley). But, the greater concern may be that many school counselors and parents are not always steering students in the right direction. Parents, especially, are sometimes more "out of the loop" than school counselors. Many parents do not know, for example, that their child can spend **two years in an Associate degree program at a community college and earn an electronics degree which could get them a job at Tobyhanna Army Depot for about \$38,000 a year**. That's a great return on investment.

Area employers can also receive funding from various sources to help train new workers and increase the skills of incumbent workers. With a more talented and trained workforce, employers may be much more willing to offer those higher salaries often found in other markets.

Information for this article was obtained from the Pocono Business Journal, June 2008. "Can Your Wages Compete with Neighboring Counties?" Article by Ken Clark.



"...It's economic development, workforce development and the missing link: education."

Joseph Sebelin, Executive Director Pocono Counties Workforce Investment Area

The Department of Labor's, Employment and Training Administration announces the availability of approximately **\$10 million in grant funds under the Technology-Based Learning Initiative** to be awarded through a competitive process.

The purpose of the Initiative is to expand access to training resulting in an increased number of workers trained, particularly in high-growth, high-demand occupations, and to **meet the needs of industry for skilled employees**. This SGA is designed to help workers quickly acquire the training and skills they need to be successful in today's global economy, and thereby increase the nation's economic competitiveness and growth. Funds will be awarded to public, private for-profit, and private non-profit organizations, including educational institutions and registered apprenticeship sponsors. Partnership with the publicly-funded workforce investment system is required.

The **closing date for receipt of applications under this announcement is August 19, 2008**. Applications and information can be obtained at www.workforce3one.org.

News and Events...

Pocono Mountains Hospitality Scholarship Golf Tournament 2008

A Great Success!!!!

PA CareerLink Monroe County and the Pocono Mountains Visitors Bureau hosted a Golf Tournament at Skytop Lodge on June 30.

It was a beautiful day for golf on Monday, June 30th, at Skytop Lodge.

The tournament was a great success, and as a result, **area youth will receive a scholarship for post-secondary training in the Hospitality and Tourism industry.**

Thanks to all who participated in the tournament, sponsors, and staff who helped organize the event.

Pennsylvania
CareerLink
MONROE COUNTY



PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

THE BREP (Business Expansion and Retention) Program has been funded again this fiscal year. Once again, The PA CareerLink Business Services Team offers their services to employers as part of this valuable program.

If you'd like to take part in a BREP interview and find out what services are available to help your company stay and grow in PA, please contact our office at 570-620-2850 and ask to speak with a Business Services Representative about the BREP program.

To date, over 73,000 interviews have been conducted across the state!



Wall Street West Awards Record \$6.5 Million to Develop Northeastern PA's Workforce

On May 30, at the University of Scranton, Wall Street West's 4th regional meeting brought together local, state, and federal officials for the **announcement of more than \$6.5 million in federal funding** for projects designed to strengthen the region's ability to sustain the jobs of the future.

The meeting's keynote speaker was Congressman Paul E. Kanjorski (PA-11), who discussed the evolution of the Wall Street West project since its inception.

Organizations received more than \$5.4 million in federal WIRED funds to create programs that will strengthen the workforce capacity in the nine-county region, making them a pre-eminent locale for business attraction.

Wall Street West will allocate a total of \$1 million to the region's Workforce Investment Boards for the continuation of the WIB Collaborative.

Other notable awards in the immediate area were:

- \$1 million to NEPA Business Education Workforce Partnership
- \$250,000 for the Northeast PA - Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) Center
- \$285,000 to Workforce Wayne to create a 21st Century Workforce Delivery System
- \$475,000 to the Commonwealth's WEDnetPA Program for training and skill development programs

More information can be obtained by visiting www.wallstreetwest.org.