

Workforce Development Report

June 2019

Recommendations: Workforce problems are not unique to Pulaski County nor can they be traced to a singular cause. Because there are multiple causes to the problem, there are multiple solutions to addressing the issue. Steps that Pulaski County can take to increase the size and quality of the available workforce includes expanding workforce participation by local residents as well as attracting new residents to the County:

- ✓ Indicates endorsement by the Pulaski County Economic Development Authority at their October 23, 2018 meeting. **Changes since last report are in orange.**

Increasing Local Workforce Participation Rates

- ✓ 1. Expanding Child Care Options - Significantly expanding childcare options to provide mothers and fathers a ready option for both parents to work while raising young children.

The YMCA and the Pulaski County High School Career and Technical Education are working together to connect PCHS students needing practical training to meet certification standards with childcare providers. The YMCA is seeking to expand childcare offerings at the former Calfee School and T.G. Howard facilities.

2. Providing Elder Care - Continuing operation of the Adult Day Care facility to give those caring for elderly parents the ability to continue working

3. Building a Vision of the Benefits of Working - Publication of testimonials from those who have recently joined the Pulaski County workforce, describing how it feels to be able to be financially self-sufficient.

- ✓ 4. Employment of Inmates – Providing job referrals for inmates currently working for localities would help local firms assess the benefit of hiring former inmates. Providing wrap around counseling services along with utilizing homeless services, food pantries and transportation assistance could make a difference in the lives of approximately 500 inmates being released each month.

*Inmate referral forms have been developed and are being used to document work done for Pulaski County by New River Regional Jail inmates. In addition, local employers are being informed about this program and are being asked to consider their hiring standards for felons and to consider providing jobs to participants in the drug court. Organized a meeting between Luke Allison and Anthony Akers connecting Luke's interest through the MOVA foundation to provide housing for former inmates with the Drug Courts need for participant housing. "Report to Work" proposed by Jonathan Sweet, County Administrator as an alternative to incarceration for non-violent offenders. **The first graduate of the program is entering the workforce but would not respond to available assistance. We also plan to explore the use of the Department of Labor Federal Bonding Program to support the existing Trustee Referral Program and the upcoming Work Report program.***

- ✓ 5. Reaching the Disenfranchised - Recognizing the disconnection between those who are in and those out of the workforce. Persons not currently participating in the workforce may not be aware of employment opportunities or the services offered at Workforce Centers and/or temp agencies. Suggested advertising options for available jobs and workforce services could focus on places likely to be utilized by persons not in the workforce such as: the Pulaski County courthouse, Social Services, New River Valley Community Services Board, New River Valley Community Corrections and Pretrial Services, New River Valley Public Defender's Office, Daily Bread, the Free Clinic, Taking it to the Streets Homeless Ministry, New River Jail visitation rooms and local convenience stores.

Facebook page has multiple job postings, staffing agencies and local employers are being given editorial rights to post and control their own openings. Revised posters have been placed in approximately 100 locations and \$30 has been spent of the \$500 to promote the Facebook page. The Facebook page has 908 follows, 894 likes and 1,630 post reach this week. There continue to be over 50 jobs posted on the web site. Plans are to continue to connect companies with the Facebook page while boosting the page and continuing to spread the word to residents through additional poster locations.

I have enlisted the help of Jordan Whitt, a Russell County native and RU graduate currently working for the Town of Pulaski in social media marketing. I am asking for his help in enhancing the current Pulaski County VA Jobs Facebook page using the remainder of the \$500 authorized for boosting use of the page as a recruitment tool. In addition, we plan to mirror the Facebook page to Instagram and target specific job markets in the Peterstown WV and to the remainder of SW Virginia.

- ✓ 6. Flexible Employment Practices – Employers can also be a major driver in addressing workforce issues through utilizing non-traditional venues for advertising available jobs, flexible hiring standards when considering the employment of persons with criminal records, and considering job sharing arrangements, allowing for less than eight-hour per day employment arrangements.

To date, meetings have been held with Lowes, Phoenix Packaging, Korona, New River Valley Packaging, Red Sun Farms, Falls Stamping, Mar Bal, and Motion Control to discuss workforce issues. Multiple offers have also been made to meet with Volvo, Hoover Color and Salem Stone. The attached Employer Tools and have been distributed to various employers.

In addition, I would like to ask EDA members for suggestions as to any additional employers you would like to see visited. Megan Atkinson, PCHS CTE Principal and Angela Joyner, Executive Director of the Radford University Center for Career and Talent Development and Ross Matney, Coordinator of Workforce Training at New River Community College are participating in these visits as schedules permit.

I set up a booth at the Chamber of Commerce Business to Business Fair at Claytor Lake State Park and signed up employers in using the Facebook page.

I plan to meet with the New River/Mount Rogers Business Services Group on June 17th to discuss the County's efforts with others involved in addressing workforce issues.

Kimber Simmons is offering to arrange a Workforce Exchange event in which three diverse Pulaski County companies would meet with workforce development and local economic development staff to discuss workforce issues. This type of meeting has been successful in other communities and endorsement by the EDA and sponsorship of food is recommended. (See attached information)

Megan Atkinson is proposing holding a local Manufacturing Education Expo on September 10th to be followed by providing all 301 8th grade students with tours of local manufacturing facilities on National Manufacturing Day (First Friday in October). Support by the EDA of these events is recommended. (See attached information)

7. Transportation to and from Work – Having more than one means of getting to a from work has been identified as a major impediment to long-term employment in interviews with the four staffing agencies serving Pulaski County. Pulaski Area Transit and the availability of several surplus PAT vans are resources that could be utilized to provide transportation services to a from work.

Pulaski Area Transit (PAT) is willing to run special busses providing transportation to and from work. Plans are to run the busses between the Maple Shade parking lot, Meadowview Apartments, Washington Square and perhaps Maple Garden apartments in Dublin just before and after shift changes at Mar-Bal, Phoenix Packaging, Korona Candles and other participating employers.

A normal one-way fare for PAT during daytime hours is \$2 per trip. Due to the need to pay drivers more for night work and the greater average distance involved in transporting persons to work, it is expected that the cost to PAT would be more than \$2. It is being suggested that employers offer payroll deduction of a weekly amount of \$10 per participating employee (\$1 per trip for 2 trips per day 5 days per week), to be matched by a corporate contribution of \$20 per week per participating employee. This would provide PAT with a total fare of \$3 per trip. To date, 3 of 4 employers have indicated an interest in this option and are polling employees to determine their interest.

A revised questionnaire to be used in polling potential employees has been developed and is being forwarded to companies for their consideration.

Attracting New Residents to Pulaski County

8. Regional Marketing - A regional marketing campaign could be held to advertise available jobs in localities within reasonable driving distance from Pulaski County employers, which have relatively low workforce participation rates, and high unemployment rates. Suggestions would Bland, Grayson and Tazewell counties. To be effective, an advertising campaign should be combined with some form of temporary housing allowing employees the option to remain in Pulaski County one or more nights per week, coordinated ride sharing and/or commuter bus, and local realtor packets describing available housing for those interested in moving their families to Pulaski County.
9. Recruitment of RU and VT students – Most students are focused on the university environments. Organization of area tours could provide greater understanding of what it is like to live and work in Pulaski County and Virginia’s New River Valley. In addition to a general awareness program, direct marketing of employment opportunities to students affected by financial and academic difficulties could provide them with a needed lifeline during a difficult time. These opportunities could include:
- a. Expansion of internship opportunities focusing on local employers;
 - b. Employment allowing students to earn the money they may need to continue their education; and;
 - c. Should they face academic rather than financial difficulties, the ability to stay in the area and retake failed classes at another institution, to earn an income to pay off student loans, and the ability to continue to begin to live independently.

Productive meetings have been held with Richard Alvarez and Dr. Angela Joyner, Executive Director of the Radford University Center for Career and Talent Development. As a result, there were six avenues of possible coordination between local employers and Radford University:

- 1. Research by professors and student classes to address issues facing local companies.*
- 2. Placement of graduates into local jobs with an emphasis on management, accounting, marketing automation and similar fields applicable to the manufacturing environment.*
- 3. Internships for active students involving part-time employment or doing special projects for local employers.*
- 4. Cooperative employment allowing students to work for a period of time to either take a semester off or to take a reduced academic load in order to try out employment in their field of study.*
- 5. Employment as a means of closing a financial gap – allowing students to stay in the area to earn money for future semesters as a way of closing a funding gap in their education.*
- 6. Employment for students to entering the local workforce on a permanent basis prior to graduation.*

Angela Joiner has joined the team in meeting with employers.

I am drafting a letter to students leaving Radford University either as graduates or those on an exit ramp (ie Drop Outs), encouraging them to consider local employment (and educational) opportunities as an alternative to returning home.

I plan to attend a Go VA Region 2 Growth and Diversification Plan meeting on Wednesday, June 19 to discuss workforce issues as they impact the economic growth and diversification plan (see https://econdev.vt.edu/content/dam/econdev_vt_edu/govirginia_documentation/GOVA_region2_gandd.pdf). The session will provide opportunities for input, but more importantly seek to identify ideas for future projects.

The sessions will be an opportunity for general input and feedback, but the Council is particularly interested in:

- Suggestions for projects and project development ideas for the next two years*
- Input on enhancing the focus and project development work for of the four core strategies: Technology development. Technology development includes increasing investments for innovative technologies, expanding rates of research commercialized in the private sector, supporting talent attraction efforts focused on individuals with technological skills, and growing the number of individuals entering training and education programs that develop technological skills.*
- Input on projects that include a focus on K-12, long term talent retention and occupation pipeline development for the region.*

The meeting is being coordinated by the Vibrant Virginia team at the Virginia Tech Office of Economic Development and I plan to discuss the implementation of a pipeline connecting VT students (both graduates and drop outs) with local employers.