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PA House Commerce Committee
Economic Development Hearing
Shenango Valley Chamber
Thursday, September 13, 2007

My name is Angela Palumbo and I am the Pennsylvania CareerLink Mercer County's Site Administrator. I have been a State employee for nearly 27 years, and have been the CareerLink Administrator for nearly seven years.

The Pennsylvania CareerLink Mercer County is the one-stop of employment and training. Through our local efforts, we have worked very closely to become known as "the hub of workforce development activities" for our County.

We have shared a partnership with various agencies that have co-located their employment and training staff within the CareerLink comprehensive site, here in Downtown Sharon. Some of those agencies include the Bureau of Workforce Development Partnership, West Central Job Partnership (our CareerLink fiscal entity), Community Action Partnership of Mercer, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Mercer County Career Center (Vo-Tech) Intermediate Unit IV, Literacy Council of Mercer County and Aging. We have succeeded in reaching out to various other partners throughout Mercer County including the Shenango Valley Urban League, United Way, Community Counseling, Chambers of Commerce, and all economic development entities that exist.

The Pennsylvania CareerLink Mercer County is in the West Central Workforce Investment area along with Lawrence County. Our two county Workforce Investment Board, of which I am the Labor and Industry representative, have worked closely with our customers, both job seekers and employers, in integrating services and creating a seamless workforce system that benefits their needs.

By providing resources in a universally accessible comprehensive site, the Pennsylvania CareerLink Mercer County has continually met and exceeded the goals established by the West Central Workforce Investment Board. Based on guidelines from the Workforce Investment Board, staff from the CareerLink has been involved in discussions regarding occupations that are most critical to the local economic base. The WIB has aggregated a number of industry segments to form a Business Supportive Services Cluster. Occupations that have skill requirements and ongoing demand are auditors/accountants, bookkeeping/accounting and auditing clerks, computer support specialists, secretaries and clerks. Manufacturing may be redistributing some employment from lesser skill to occupations requiring moderately intense technology skills. Additionally, Health Care and Social Assistance is the largest area industry regarding total employment and those occupations include nurses, licensed practical nurses, emergency medical technicians and paramedics, radiological technologists and technicians and nursing aides. These various clusters have become the focus of career planning and guidance to our customers. Employer needs regarding the training of incumbent workers to upgrade skills to remain competitive in the economy are addressed through the MEEN (Manufacturing Education Economic Network), which was created through a fourteen county initiative to meet employer-training needs. The West Central WIB's workforce development manager worked closely with the CareerLink Administrator to identify employers who could benefit from the incumbent worker training money. Transportation and logistics, another identified cluster has also been targeted a high priority occupation. TEEN (Transportation Education Economic Network) was formulated to build a workforce for the transportation industry. A financial services team is presently identifying needs of the financial industry and is working closely with the WIB and CareerLink along with other financial services representatives from the local area. As these targeted clusters have been identified, career planning and guidance are provided to customers to create a workforce to meet these high priority demand occupations needs.

Our Business Services Team utilizes labor market analysis information to target our local Industry Cluster. We especially pay attention to those clusters with expected growth. These growth

industries are projected to add substantial numbers of new jobs to our local economy, and will affect the growth of other industries. These businesses may require new technology requiring new skills for workers. The analysis information must be monitored as a way to determine our local workforce demographics. If an industry were expected to decline, that may create an additional pool of job seekers to help meet the need of our growth industries. Prioritizing our efforts for possible solutions:

- We must develop our labor force, especially our young workers**
- Improve competency for both new and incumbent workers**
- Expand post secondary training opportunities to include apprenticeships and community colleges in our workforce development plan**
- Access new and/or untapped labor pools**
- Transition workers from declining industries**
- Re-train and upgrade skills of incumbent workers.**

Innovative ideas and planning is necessary to meet the challenges these growth industry demands will place on human resource issues in our local workforce.

The CareerLink of Mercer County's Business Services Team consists of the following representative agencies: BWDP, West Central Job Partnership, Community Action Partnership of Mercer County, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and the CareerLink Administrator. The mission of the Business Services Team is to provide guidance, resources and strategic workforce solutions to employer customers. Through their collaborative efforts, the Business Service Team maintains a customer-friendly process to identify and access resources in response to specific business needs. In a partnership with employers, the Mercer County Business Services Team will maintain existing relationships and develop new relationships to advance our local workforce and strengthen our economy. They promote industry stability and growth while continually improving the quality of the Mercer County workforce, business climate and economy. They also serve through the CareerLink as a central location where businesses can obtain coordinated assistance in recruiting, training and development of new or existing workers. The BST has developed a flexible delivery of business services to assess, analyze, project and respond rapidly to

the changing needs of the businesses in our county. In addition, they will identify and utilize customer feedback to measure and evaluate effectiveness for continuous improvement. The relationship that exists between BWDP and West Central Job Partnership Staff and other partner agencies is exemplary. They promote the services of the CareerLink as one united organization versus the separate silo funding agencies alone. They are remarkably successful in providing resources to our employers. The BWDP staff is responsible for monitoring the job orders in the CareerLink System. As staff provide information to employers regarding listing their job orders and pre-screening applicants, they are also informed of the various incentive programs provided by other agencies at the CareerLink including disability services, on-the-job training and subsidized employment opportunities. The BWDP staff provides referrals to WIA staff or other partners for eligibility and orientation at which time assessments are administered. An employer can then benefit from the various reimbursements redeemable to them.

Collaboratively, the Business Services Team builds relationships within the employer community. All members of the Business Services Team provide the following summary of business services:

- Serve as a Consultant for the One-Stop System**
- Develop long-term Strategic Industry Partnerships**
- Study targeted Clusters to gain knowledge of those industries**
- Customize quality services to meet customer needs**
- Provide linkages to alternative resources and other appropriate agencies**
- Establish an understanding of the current and future workforce needs**
- Provide pre and post employment follow-up**
- Schedule site visits/tours**
- Organize job fairs, career expo's and seminars for sharing information**
- Maintain frequent ongoing contact with recruiters who have established relationships to avoid duplication**
- Provide financial linkages to training (Incumbent Worker, WEDnet, CJT etc.)**
- Determine Customer Satisfaction**
- Be responsive to individual customer needs**

- **Serve as a single point of contact and single point of accountability**
- **Help employers to improve long-term competitive advantage and retention**
- **Keep abreast of developments in local, national and international career trends**
- **Offer continuous development, implementation and evaluation**

The above-mentioned represents the steps taken to improve partner's relationships in proving that a One-Stop System exists for employers. The continuation of this effort is a positive one and always focused on continuous improvement. All members are committed to providing quality customer service to our employers and take this responsibility very seriously.

West Central Job Partnership hired a Workforce Development Manager that works closely with staff at the CareerLink and the CareerLink Administrator and is represented in the Business Services Team. The Workforce Development Manager and CareerLink Administrator are involved in the Company Action Plans from the Call Program with Economic Development. Workforce issues such as recruitment of new employees and training issues are discussed and either one of the two contact the employers regarding their needs. The Workforce Development Manager acts as a representative of the CareerLink and this proven positive for the CareerLink. Many employers look at the CareerLink as the "hub of workforce development" in Mercer County. In an effort to address the manufacturing needs of the community the MEEN, Manufacturing Education and Economic Network was born as a result of the Pennsylvania Workforce Investment Board's Industry Partnership initiative to establish a collective network of integrated workforce activities. A regional partnership exists that includes fourteen counties (Cameron, Clarion, Clearfield, Crawford, Elk, Erie, Forest, Jefferson, McKean, Mercer, Potter, Venango and Warren). Mercer County's industry sector group includes: metals and metal fabrication. As a result of this partnership, employers that work closely with the Mercer County CareerLink were contacted by the CareerLink Administrator and Workforce Development Manager regarding incumbent worker training monies for their companies. The Mercer County CareerLink has been involved with

employers for the last five years regarding WEDnet, hosting seminars with the county's lead economic development and the CareerLink's Training Consortium (a group of fifteen educational institutions) that are dedicated to the mission of the CareerLink in developing a skilled workforce. In addition, all literacy providers in Mercer County have a role in the CareerLink. Many employers have had literacy training conducted on-site as a result of their relationship with the CareerLink.

Please see the year-end statistical results of the Pennsylvania CareerLink Mercer County's impact on Labor Exchange Services.

An additional listing of recent Industry Partnerships is attached for your review showing the West Central Workforce Investment area of Mercer/Lawrence County and the targeted clusters it has serviced.

The CareerLink is very involved with Penn Northwest Development, the County's lead economic development agency. In every instance that a potential employer questions workforce availability, the CareerLink is there to present it's abundant resources for workforce development and recruitment.

In attempting to meet the needs of our employers, the CareerLink has worked closely with Precision Manufacturing Institute from Crawford County. PMI has been a leader in skilled manufacturing training for more than a decade. Through the efforts of not only the CareerLink, but also Penn Northwest Economic Development and the Shenango Valley Foundation, PMI will be present in the Shenango Valley to provide quality skilled training for the Region. A building is currently under construction and it is hopeful that classes will begin in January, 2008.

To elaborate on the "region" our WIB Director and the Mercer/Lawrence CareerLink's have been in discussions to begin an Interstate Region with Ohio's Trumbull, Mahoning and Columbiana Counties under the Workforce Investment Act. The Pennsylvania State WIB endorsed the plan to move forward as well as the Ohio Workforce Investment Board. Both Governor Rendell and Governor Strickland are in favor of pursuing this interstate region. Mercer County's re-designation into the Metropolitan Statistical

Labor Market of the Ohio three-county area made this a more viable opportunity to initiate. We have had several meetings with Ohio One-Stop Representatives to attempt to coordinate efforts for application of a Regional Innovation Grant to assist in the planning for future layoffs of dislocated workers and coordinating resources across state lines to address their needs.

That will be the beginning of what can be done through this regional effort.

Additionally, there is a direct connection to the LindenPointe Innovative Business Campus in Hermitage, Pennsylvania. I am on the Hermitage Community and Economic Development Board. As targeted industries were identified by the WIB, an emerging occupation came to light—electronics. The electronics cluster was in part brought to the table by two semi-conductor businesses that moved to LindenPointe. Many meetings later, and a special meeting held at the Mercer County CareerLink with Deputy Secretary Sandy Vito of L&I, WIB members and employers, as well as City of Hermitage officials, the Department of Labor and Industry supported an Electronics/Semiconductor Industry Partnership Grant for the planning and design of a technology center with input from relevant educators and private sector participants. The LindenPointe Technology Center is part of the RACP (Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program and the project is in the Capital Budget bill pending the release of funds. The project total is \$4.5 million dollars and the funding request is for \$2.25 million. This project is cutting edge for not only Mercer County but also the region and ties in with training providers throughout the Penn-Ohio Western Regional area.

The Pennsylvania CareerLink Mercer County has always been involved with economic development efforts for our County. Many other CareerLink's are continuing their efforts to build relationships with their local area economic development agencies. Because I/we have shared this partnership for a very long time, it has benefited our area in many ways. We believe economic and workforce development go hand in hand. We do not wish that we were involved, we are!