

LGFCU Excellence in Innovation Award Project Evaluation

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Title of Program	Warren County High School Comprehensive Career Day
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FLSA Designation	Both (if applicable to a team)
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Description of Productivity Improvement

For the past 20-30 years local industries and companies have had the good fortune to employ a quality workforce that is loyal and exhibits excellent work ethics. However, as these employees are starting to retire these same industries are now experiencing a number of issues when it comes to hiring employees to fill the vacancies. For example applicants do not have the necessary skills for a manufacturing environment, lack of transportation to get to and from the work site, drug use, failing background checks, physical fitness, and the list goes on.

The challenge is to find a way to generate the workforce required by the industry and local businesses. Throughout the year, through quarterly industry roundtable meetings, the economic development office kept hearing that this issue needed to be addressed. That is when the Economic Development office decided to assume the leadership role in organizing, planning, and executing the first Career Day event for the local high school students. It became obvious real fast that planning and conducting these events involves much time and energy by those participating. From the start the Economic Development office was able to establish key partnerships with the participants and leverage their resources to ensure this was a successful event.

The key to success was identifying the students (high school seniors) that were not leaving the general area for college or a job after graduation and focusing on exposing them to the many career opportunities that were available in their own back yard. From the outset everyone that heard about this effort was excited and willing to participate. The idea of taking the students out of the classroom environment and letting them meet with local business leaders was huge. This was an opportunity

that most adults haven't had the opportunity to do. Also the idea of hosting a wide variety of career themes was instrumental in keeping the students attention throughout the event. A static display of emergency response and military vehicles was strategically placed at the entrance to the building were the event was being held to get their attention when they arrived. That set the tone for the entire event.

At this point we are not able to assess the impact being made on the students or the industries but what we do know is this was very well received by everyone involved and the request to make this an annual event has been highly encouraged. As word spreads about what is being offered to these students more and more people want to participate in the next event which is now scheduled for March 2017. The next Career Day will include both juniors and seniors. Our hope is that this will help educate the next generation and prepare them to some extent for a rewarding career. Based on the support and encouragement received we feel this event will not only grow but become a model for this region of North Carolina.

Description of why this project was initiated

During 2015, the Director of the Economic Development office started hosting industry roundtable meetings with the local businesses and industries to listen to their concerns and find out what assistance they needed in order to keep them operating at full capacity. It was during these meeting that a particular theme started emerging; one that was focused around the need for a skilled workforce with good work ethics. Warren County, NC is a lot like other rural areas in that most of the workforce comes from within a 25-30 mile radius and the workforce to support those jobs is limited. The existing industries and companies were noticing that their current workforce was getting older and retiring at a faster rate and they were having difficulty backfilling those employees. The problem was there was a real possibility that these companies would start facing staffing issues in the near future that could eventually lead to downsizing or possibly closing the plants. We were determined to try and find a solution to this dilemma. The thinking has usually been to go after those that were unemployed or underemployed but that did not fix the problem. What had not been tried before was presenting the high school youth with the opportunities available to them within their communities and coaching them on what they need to do to prepare for careers after high school. This was going to be a challenge but not something that couldn't be accomplished with the right people and proper planning.

Quantifiable results (sustainability, cost savings, cost avoidance and/or a higher level of service).

Indication of what resources were used and what was done with any accrued time savings

During the roundtable meetings the plant managers continued to talk about the vacancies they had and the difficulty they were experiencing finding people qualified to fill these positions. In talking with various agencies about people seeking work, we found that many were unable to pass entry level requirements to get an interview. So we teamed up with Warren County Schools' Director of Technology/Career and Technical Education to bring together future job seekers and people who could help them. The team decided to focus their efforts on those Warren County High School seniors who were not planning to attend college after graduation and did not have a full-time job lined up. The students that were chosen to participate had already declared that they were focused on starting a career following graduation or attend community college part-time while working. Based on this

criteria, more than two dozen seniors from Warren County High School were selected to attend the event and learn about employment opportunities within their locality and get information on how to land a job during the Career Day event held on September 16, 2015.

One of the goals of the Career Day was to make the students aware of how many different opportunities there are available to them in their county and region. This venue also offered the unique opportunity for the students to meet with the plant managers and human resources staff and talk about the qualifications needed for the positions being offered. This was also an opportunity to educate the general public about the many jobs available and the opportunities available to them. The challenge now is how to prepare for the positions that are available. During the Career Day event the students found out there were over 100 positions, with Federal, State, and local government as well as the private sector available within the local commuting distance.

Another goal of this event was to make the students aware of what they could expect if they wanted to pursue one of these jobs. We incorporated mini-sessions into the event, taught by local professionals, which covered resume writing and soft skills, interviewing techniques, and how to dress for an interview. Each of these sessions was interactive between the student and instructor and very informative. As an example the Director of N.C. Cooperative Extension's Warren County office, taught "Dress to Impress" that included tips on what to wear for an interview, personal hygiene, body language, and jewelry, among others. Each of these mini-sessions was very well received by the students.

Other descriptive information

Objectives:

The objective of this event was two-fold. First was to expose high school seniors to the job market and what they can do to better prepare themselves for success and second to make the public aware of the job opportunities that exist with the businesses and industries within their communities. Both of these objectives were met with much excitement and enthusiasm throughout the event with the entire group asking for this to be repeated again in 2017.

Time frame for development and implementation:

The planning phase started in September 2014 with an execution date of September 2015. Since this was the first time an event like this had been attempted, it took a little longer to determine what areas we wanted to focus on, who to invite, letters of invitation, progress meetings, and static displays. We wanted to get this as close to right the first time as possible. Based on the surveys completed at the end of the event, everyone agreed this was a step in the right direction in preparing our future workforce.

Clientele:

The senior high school students of Warren County High School, Warren County, North Carolina were the targeted audience for this event. Based on the positive feedback from those attending this event, the next one is scheduled for March 2017 and those invited to participate will include the juniors and seniors from the local high school. The feedback from the students was very positive with everyone agreeing that this event was long overdue. The students were given the opportunity to interact with anyone they chose to and to spend as much time as needed to get their questions answered.

The county's role in implementing the program:

The Director of the Economic Development Office of the Warren County Economic Development Commission took the lead to plan, coordinate, and execute this event. Support was provided from the Warren County Board of Commissioners, the County Manager, the Warren County Board of Education and Staff, County Sheriff's Office, and the Warren County Emergency Medical Service. The monetary cost to support this event was minimal. Government personnel and local government facilities were used for the event to the greatest extent possible. Transportation to and from the event, including meals for the students was provided by the local school system.

Contributions of any other partners:

There were many partners that contributed to the success of this event. During the event there were seventeen tables manned by representatives of each of the following participants:

The public partners included; NC Cooperative Extension Office, Vance-Granville Community College, The Town of Warrenton, the North Carolina Department of Transportation, North Carolina Department of Public Safety, NC National Guard.

The private partners included; Glen Raven Mills, Inc. (Manufacturing), International Paper Company, Inc. (Manufacturing-Corrugated Box), Elberta Crate & Box, Inc. (Manufacturing-Wood Products), Cast Stone Systems, Inc. (Manufacturing- Architectural Cast Stone), Warren Food Works (Local Small Business), Vance Construction (Construction), Warren Hills Nursing Center, Maria Parham Medical Center (Hospital), Staff Mark (Temp Agency).