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WIB meets requirements for work-ready designation

Jasper County could become first official career readiness Missouri community by January 2014

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Nearly a dozen local officials from the fields of business, government, education, and economic and workforce development met Nov. 19 to sign an official application requesting Jasper County become Missouri's first Work-Ready Community.

The application is the culmination of several years worth of work by the Workforce Investment Board, which has been drumming up support among employers, educational institutions and municipalities for the National Career Readiness Certificate assessment since 2006.

Present at the signing were NCRC stakeholders and members of the Jasper County Work Ready Community Steering Committee, including representatives from Joplin and Carthage schools, Missouri Southern State

University, Crowder College, Jasper County, the Joplin and Carthage chambers of commerce and the Joplin Regional Partnership. Also present were business representatives from Able Manufacturing and Assembly LLC and Empire District Electric Co.

"It's really exciting seeing things start to pay off," said Jasen Jones, WIB executive director. "It's exciting seeing the benefit that employers are experiencing and that job seekers are experiencing. We've been able to watch that grow over the last few years, and it's great to see this become a community designation."

Jones said being a Work-Ready Community – a community in which a growing portion of the workforce has NCRC designations and a growing number of local employers use the NCRC in hiring decisions – gives

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Members of the Jasper County Work Ready Community Steering Committee met on Nov. 19 at the Workforce Investment Board to sign the Jasper County application to become the state's first Work-Ready Community.

NCRC: Jasper County a model for New Mexico effort

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the Jasper County area strong economic development power.

"It's really important to maintain the health of the businesses that are here, in terms of helping them find the right individuals," he said. "Helping them find those employees will help them stay strong and grow and remain thriving here in the region. ... and help to attract new businesses and expand businesses here in the region and maintain that momentum of recovery."

Troy Roland, a business representative with WIB, said a Work Ready Community designation can be important in attracting businesses to the area because of the high number of emerging – or student – workers required in the application process.

The designation is conferred by the Missouri Workforce Investment Board and is based on criteria established by ACT Business Solutions, an division of Iowa-based ACT Inc., which developed the now ubiquitous college-level entrance exam, the ACT.

According to a formula created by ACT and based on regional populations, Jasper County needed to administer the NCRC assessment to 276 emerging workers to achieve the Work Ready Community designation. Requirements for other types of workers was noticeably lower – at 143 for transitioning workers and 28 for current workers.

"Those emerging workers are kids in school, students in colleges and trade schools," Roland said. "Those students are so important to businesses, because that's the pipeline. That group is what employers are going to be looking at to see where the workforce is going to be 5-10 years from now."

While Jasper County is on track to be the first Work-

Ready Community in Missouri, ACT is recognizing the region as one of the most advanced nationwide in terms of working toward work-ready goals. Jones said reports from ACT listed Jasper County as No. 1 among seven states and 3,141 counties participating in the program.

Other states participating include Oregon, Wyoming, Utah, Kentucky, Virginia and South Carolina.

The local effort has been so successful, according to Roland, that ACT invited Jones to New Mexico to give a presentation about Jasper County's initiative to workforce development organizations and employer partners at a statewide conference.

Jones said New Mexico's effort is just beginning, and his message to them was to concentrate on employer involvement first.

"The more you base this on employer demand, the more successful this program will be," Jones said. "When we have someone like Susan Adams and Able Manufacturing (and Assembly LLC) putting in their Sunday help wanted ads that they prefer the NCRC, that really encourages individuals. If we were asking job seekers to take the NCRC as an educational activity, that would be a much harder sell."

Jones said response at the New Mexico conference was positive.

"They got to see that there is a realistic way to make it happen," he said. "It's not rocket science, but when we showed them that demand-driven focus, the light bulb flickered on for them. Now they see a way to get there. We really just spoke to the experience we've had here in Southwest Missouri and really showed those folks that it's possible."

National Career Readiness Certificates administered in Jasper County

The following is the number of National Career Readiness Certificates earned by current and emerging workers in the Jasper County area, according to WorkReadyCommunities.org. Workers are categorized according to station.

- Current workers, private sector – 69
- Current workers, public sector – 18
- Emerging workers, high school – 115
- Emerging workers, college – 11
- Emerging workers, adult education – 5
- Transitioning workers, unemployed – 156
- Workers not yet categorized – 172

The NCRC assessment rates workers according to their skill sets, which include things like soft skills, education and hands-on experience. Workers who earn the NCRC are given a bronze, silver, gold or platinum status based on their level of expertise and ability to begin working with little or no training. Bronze workers would need some level of on-the-job training, while platinum workers would need very little.

Jasper County has the following number of NCRC assessments given by states:

- Bronze – 81
- Silver – 337
- Gold – 127
- Platinum – 0

Source: WorkReadyCommunities.org/MO/097, based on information gathered Jan. 1-Sept. 30, 2012.

Courtesy:
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