

Hardin County becomes Work Ready certified - Certification earned on first attempt

News-Enterprise, The (Elizabethtown, KY) - Wednesday, November 19, 2014

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When it comes to economic development, Hardin County now has another tool in its toolbox.

The county was named a Kentucky Work Ready Community on Monday by Gov. Steve Beshear after one attempt.

The designation of the Kentucky Workforce Investment Board and the Kentucky Education and Workforce Development Cabinet is an assurance to employers that a local workforce is capable of staffing existing and future jobs and able to learn technologies jobs may require.

“It’s an economic development tool,” said Robert Curry, executive director of the cabinet.

Curry said for a county to become workforce ready, an application consisting of six criteria must be met. The criteria include high school graduation rate data, educational attainment data, a community commitment component, proof of soft skills or work ethic development, proof of digital literacy and a National Career Readiness Certificate.

“It’s confirmation to employers that the workforce has really mastered those skills in those areas,” he said.

The importance of the process is for a potential investor to have a quick reference of the employment capabilities of certain areas, Curry said.

“The quality of the workforce is the single most important factor,” he said about a company selecting a location to relocate or develop. “When a company starts to invest millions of dollars in equipment, they want assurances there will be a workforce to man it.”

The stringent application should be a collaborative effort of all the “movers and shakers” of the county, including education officials, elected officials, economic development officers and business and industry leaders, not just one entity, Curry said.

Although he referred to himself as “only a facilitator,” Rick Games, president and chief operating officer for the Elizabethtown Hardin County Industrial Foundation, said the application process was the culmination of work from several stakeholders in Hardin County’s economic

success.

“It indicates a willingness to work together when all of these different agencies can come together and work for a common goal,” he said.

Games said the committee consisting of a “cross section of the community” with city and county government officials, industry partners, nonprofit officials, education leaders from Elizabethtown Community and Technical College and Hardin County and Elizabethtown Independent schools, and members from Lincoln Trail Area Development District and the Kentucky Career Center met all but one of the criteria.

In the area they didn’t meet, Games said they presented a plan to achieve the standard in National Career Readiness Certificate.

“The real work involved was to draft a plan for what we didn’t have,” he said. “Otherwise, the application process went smoothly.”

With the designation, Games said the county and its promoters for economic success have another aspect to promote.

“It’s another tool in that economic development toolbox,” he said. “It tells prospective businesses that we recognize the need to continue to fill the workers pipeline.”

Games said times have changed and it is “no longer a foregone conclusion” that if a company locates to an area, qualified workers will follow.

“That’s not the case anymore,” he said.

The designation will help Games and others support existing businesses and attract new ones to the county.

“You can have the best site in the world, but if you don’t have workers to man it then it makes the site less attractive,” he said. “Under the challenges that employers see in finding a quality workforce, it shows we recognize the need to train our workforce.”

The committee received a plaque and signs Monday signifying the designation in a presentation at the Kentucky Workforce Investment Board meeting in Versailles.

Hardin is one of 16 counties with the designation. Nelson County also is Work Ready certified.

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