

Kentucky Work Ready Communities

Narrative 5: Soft Skills Program

It is critical for any county that is augmented to the status of Work Ready Community to offer its workforce an educational program geared toward improving the soft skills of its local employee workforce. Therefore, in order to distinguish Warren County as a Work Ready Community it is important to highlight the soft-skills education initiatives known as; the Work Ethic Seal program, the Warren County Industrial Training Consortium, WKU REAL, WKU Finish, and the efforts of the Barren River Workforce Investment Board (WIB), which meet the needs of a Work Ready Community.

Work Ethic Seal

The Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce's Work Ethic seal program continues to grow throughout Bowling Green and Warren County High Schools since its inception over nine years ago. The program prepares senior high school students for the transition from school to work and life beyond the classroom. Ensuring that high schools students are acquiring the needed work ethic in order to obtain and secure successful employment is one of the missions of the program.

The Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce, working with local businesses, industries and school systems, has developed the Work Ethic Seal program with its own set of specific criteria to identify these very special students whose hard work, attendance and extracurricular activities distinguish them from the norm. In the 2009-2010 educational year, 87 students graduated from the program, as did 69 students during the 2010-2011 school year. Currently, 215 students are enrolled to obtain a Work Ethic Seal. Such growth demonstrates the sustainability of this program and provides the proper foundation to continue growing this program in efforts to meet the needs of local employers.

Students receiving the Work Ethic Seal should have an advantage when seeking employment as it easily identifies potential employees with a demonstrated work ethic. Listed on college applications it shows that the student has learned the value of active participation in school, and identifies the student as one who will regularly attend class and work hard at their education.

In order to participate, students must achieve the following by the third quarter of their senior year in high school:

- Maintain regular attendance that complies with School Board policy
- Receive only two unexcused absences and/or tardies
- Have no disciplinary referrals
- Maintain a 2.5 GPA
- Be involved in at least two of the following:
 - An organized or unorganized team sport
 - An extracurricular program
 - A part-time job
 - Community service

Student's participation in the Work Ethic Seal program is voluntary. Participants must complete an application to express their interest in the program. Then they will be enrolled in the Junior

Achievement Success Skills class. The class is based on a variety of valuable life and employment lessons. The students must successfully complete the seven session Success Skill seminar in order to complete the Work Ethic Seal program in its entirety. Some of the basic concepts taught in the classroom include attitude, business careers, ethics, interviews, job applications and resumes and cover letters.

Upon completion of the program students are eligible to apply for a \$1,000 scholarship to Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green Technical College or Daymar College. Students earning Work Ethic Seals will wear a special cord at graduation and have the Work Ethic Seal affixed to their diplomas.

Warren County Industrial Training Consortium

The Consortium itself was formed by three local companies in 2004; BANDO, DESA, and NASCO, and is managed by a board of directors that includes three industry representatives along with educational and civic leaders. The Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce is also intricately involved in this process through its fiscal oversight and marketing responsibilities. These combined efforts ensure the Consortium's success in the latest training and development of the soft skills of the workforce of Warren County.

Since 2004 over 4,000 employees have enrolled in the Consortium, over 1,500 hours of training have been offered, and the Consortium has grown to 33 companies listed below:

AEP Industries, Inc.	Holley Performance Products
Bando USA, Inc.	Kiriu USA Corporation
Bendix	Kobe Aluminum Automotive Products
Berry Plastics	Lord Corporation
Cannon Automotive Solutions	NASCO
Casco Products Corp	Pan-Oston
Commonwealth Brands	RC Components
Community Action of Southern Kentucky	SCA Personal Care
Country Oven Bakery	Southern Foods
Delta Faucet	Stewart Richey Construction, Inc.
Fort Dearborn Company	Stoody
Friends of L&N Depot	Sumitomo Electric Wiring Systems, Inc.
Fruit of the Loom Headquarters	Sun Products Corporation
General Motors Assembly Plant	Topura America Fastener, Inc.
HeathCo LLC	Ventra Plastics
Hennessy/Bada Division	Woodcraft Industries

The Consortium's curriculum includes soft skills training such as

- Attendance and punctuality
- Communication
- Teamwork
- Leadership

Furthermore, as the board strives to continue to meet business and industry needs, over 100 online course offerings were added to Consortium options in 2008 and a webinar in 2011. Topics covered include work ethics, performance, management, and cross-generational productivity.

In partnership with several of the above listed businesses, Western Kentucky University's Center for Training & Development, Bowling Green Technical College, the KY Cabinet for Economic Development, and the Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce, the Consortium launched the Supervisor Certificate Program as an effort to demonstrate engagement from local business and industry.

The program was designed to teach mastery of soft skills including basic business practices, time management, problem solving and customer service. Moreover, the program is continually growing with a high demand from various companies for more cohorts in 2012.

As a goal, the WCITC anticipates an increase in enrollment of 10% in the Consortium membership, or 100 new participants. This increased goal will both meet the advancement needs of local employers, and raise the level of talent in Warren County.

One of the founding companies, BANDO USA, also considers training through the consortium a pivotal part of their team management. BANDO Training Coordinator Rita Berry explained that the Consortium's training is used to equip employees who have been promoted to positions like team leader or assistant manager, with the necessary skills needed for their new advancement.

Moreover, the Consortium is not just recognized locally as an important strategic training initiative but as a model program across the United States. WKU received the Distinguished Non-Credit Program Award for the Consortium from the Association of Continuing Higher Education (ACHE). Also, the University Professional Continuing Education Association awarded WKU with the UPCEA South Program of Excellence only further demonstrating the Consortium's world-class standing.

WKU Center for Training & Development

Western Kentucky University (WKU) Center for Training & Development (CTD) provides a wide range of employee training programs for businesses and industries in South Central Kentucky. Over the last 15 years, the Center has conducted approximately 10,000 training sessions for over 100,000 employees. This includes training on over 200 soft skills topics including program development, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) "Essentials of Human Resource Management" certificate, the SHRM Learning System professional designation preparation program and the creation of partnerships.

WKU Finish

WKU's Finish is a program driven by the Council on Post Secondary Education's Project Graduate initiative. WKU Finish maintains a strong mission to assist students who previously attended WKU and left before obtaining their degree. WKU Finish counselors reach out to students who have attended college and run into various challenges that prohibited them from earning their degree. The program promotes stronger institutionalized support to assist students in coordinating the resources, degree programs, and departmental support to achieve degree attainment. By forging these components into one clearinghouse, WKU Finish develops the Warren County workforce by ensuring that each student completes the education necessary to capitalizing on their skills in the workplace.

WKU REAL

WKU's Reaching Each Adult Learner (REAL) promotes educational access for adults in the WKU area by incorporating outreach to promote education among Kentucky adults and communities, counseling to connect career interests with degree opportunities, and advocacy to access services beneficial to adult students. The program currently serves approximately 3,800 adult students enrolled in WKU. In

establishing an outreach and support group, WKU in Warren County trains a workforce with soft skills that will satisfy the needs of local employers and support the county's economy.

BGTC AMTEC

Bowling Green Technical College (BGTC)'s Automotive Manufacturing Technical Education Collaborative (AMTEC) is a national collaborative effort between automotive manufacturing businesses and BGTC with the vision of preparing a skilled automotive manufacturing labor force with an emphasis in Lean Manufacturing. This training offered by BGTC produces a workforce prepared to adapt to fluctuating customer demands, green environmental initiatives, and rapidly improving technology.

Barren River Workforce Investment Board

The Barren River WIB has partnered with Junior Achievement this year to conduct the *JA Success Skills* and the *Economics for Success* at Warren County Alternative Schools and the Warren County Regional Juvenile Detention Center. The primary goal of the JA program is to equip youth with employable job-ready skills, raise awareness of the importance of staying in school, encourage entrepreneurship, and show youth how their talent and abilities can create better lives for themselves and those around them.

WIA Summer Youth Program

The Barren River WIB funded the WIA Summer Youth Program for its fourth year in 2011. This program provides eligible youth participants, ages 16 to 21 year olds, with career readiness and work experience. A main objective of this program is to provide youth with work experience opportunities over the summer. Summer employment opportunities shall include paid work experience, as well as workshops and training in employability skills, work readiness, and general workplace requirements.

Job's for Kentucky Graduates Program

The Barren River WIB also maintains the Jobs for Kentucky's Graduates (JKG) program through Warren Central High School. JKG is a state-based national non-profit organization dedicated to preventing dropouts among young people who are most at-risk. Program participants receive work readiness skills, leadership development, and job shadowing/mentoring services. JKG has delivered consistent results by helping young people stay in school through graduation, pursue postsecondary education and secure quality entry-level jobs leading to career advancement opportunities.

WCPS Leader in Me

Inspired by Stephen Covey's book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Students* Warren County Public Schools (WCPS) have begun a series known as the "Leader in Me" program. This strategic initiative aims to equip students with leadership skills and encourages them to take initiative in their communities.

Kentucky Area Career Center Workshops

The Kentucky Area Career Center, Bowling Green office offers many in house workshops as well as virtual workshops online to increase availability and attendance. In either setting, the topics covered are general job search tips, resume writing, cover letters, completing applications, interviews, thank you letters, interest and ability assessments, and refining of spelling, math and grammar skills.

Ultimately, any community that expects to achieve the high distinguishment of Work Ready Community must meet the needs of its workforce by offering a series of soft skills training programs that promote world-class work ethic and a well-rounded workforce—programs like the Work Ethic Seal, the Warren County Industrial Training Consortium, WKU REAL, WKU Finish, BGTC AMTEC and the efforts of the Barren River WIB.