



opportunityreturns

Creating more jobs for today and tomorrow

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Rod R. Blagojevich – Governor

news

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 12, 2004

CONTACTS:

Cheryle Jackson	312/814.3158 (office)
Angelynne Amores	312/636.6148 (cell)
Abby Ottenhoff	312/814.3158 (office)
Andrew Ross	312/814.7168 (Opp. Returns)

GOVERNOR ANNOUNCES MAJOR *OPPORTUNITY RETURNS* TRAINING GRANT FOR SOUTHWESTERN ILLINOIS COLLEGE

More than 20 local companies and 1200 employees will benefit from grant

BELLEVILLE - Governor Rod Blagojevich announced today an *Opportunity Returns* workforce-training grant of more than **\$215,000** to Southwestern Illinois College that will allow the community college to provide customized, employer-driven training to companies throughout the Southwest region. The Center for Training Innovations at Southwestern Illinois College will train **1,220** employees from 22 participating companies looking to remain on the cutting edge, but in need of retooled leadership skills, manufacturing techniques, and related worker skills to remain competitive. The grant award follows the December rollout of the comprehensive economic development package for the Southwest region known as *Opportunity Returns*, the Governor's regional, pro-active plan designed to create jobs and spur the local economy.

"Often times vibrant, successful companies are in need of targeted support to let them revamp their operations and reach new levels of growth. These proven companies aren't lacking business savvy or customer demand, but only a means of modernizing their workforces' skills in areas such as technology, safety, and leadership. *Opportunity Returns* is providing the resources needed to accomplish these important goals. It is a great way to begin a new year by reaching an unprecedented number of workers, and improving the opportunities for growth and prosperity at companies across the Metro East region," Governor Blagojevich said.

The 22 companies selected by Southwestern Illinois College were chosen based on key economic indicators, such as their current impact on the economic health of the region and their overall need for training to remain competitive within their respective markets. A variety of courses will be offered by the school to company employees with training focusing on three major categories: computer skills, quality and safety, and technical and workplace skills. Southwestern Illinois College is the sixth largest community college in the state and has campuses located in Belleville, Granite City, and Red Bud.

The grant to Southwestern Illinois College is being awarded through the Employer Training Investment Program's (ETIP) Small/Mid-sized Company component. ETIP is a new generation of employer-focused, customized training grants created through the "21st Century Jobs" Training Initiative. The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) administers the ETIP grants, which reimburse companies and organizations for up to 50% of the costs of training their employees.

(more)

Governor Blagojevich's *Opportunity Returns* regional economic development plan is the most aggressive, comprehensive approach to creating jobs in Illinois' history. Since a one-size-fits-all approach to economic development just doesn't work, the Governor has divided the state into 10 regions – finding areas with common economic strengths and needs, and developing a plan with specific actions for each region. This grassroots effort for the Southern region is a product of significant outreach over several months with business, civic and labor leaders, and elected officials. The more than 50 specific projects that the Governor announced in December for Southwestern Illinois are designed to be flexible and effective. This plan is tailored to deliver real results that local businesses will see, feel, and, hopefully, profit from.

“The Employer Training and Investment Program was created because employers best understand the needs of their own businesses. The skills that these workers will gain through this grant to Southwestern Illinois College are all employer driven. More than 20 companies are being provided with training resources in areas that they highlighted as critical in order to thrive in this ultra-competitive marketplace. We are able to meet their priorities and foster the economic growth and vitality of this entire region,” DCEO Director Jack Lavin said.

"The Center for Training Innovations has been partnering with local businesses to provide performance improvement programs since 1993. This partnership between the state, the college and local companies will assist us in enhancing the skills of more than one thousand area workers, boosting productivity and the bottom line for our company partners," Southwestern Illinois College's Center for Training Innovations Director Lynette Rienbolt said.

The \$215,000 grant to Southwestern Illinois College follows last month's announcement of a \$52,000 *Opportunity Returns* ETIP grant to Hubbell, Inc., a manufacturer of electrical enclosures located in Freeburg. The \$267,000 invested to date in the Southwest region companies through *Opportunity Returns* will enhance the professional skills of nearly 1,300 workers.

#####