



opportunityreturns

Creating more jobs for today and tomorrow

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
Rod R. Blagojevich – Governor

news

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 24, 2004

CONTACTS:

Cheryle Jackson	312/814.3158 (office)
Angelynne Amores	312/636.6148 (cell)
Abby Ottenhoff	312/814.3158 (office)
Rebecca Rausch	217/782.7355 (office)
Andrew Ross	312/814.7168 (Opp. Returns)

GOVERNOR ANNOUNCES CRITICAL PLANNING GRANT TO STRENGTHEN WORKER SKILLS IN THE NORTHERN STATELINE REGION

SPRINGFIELD - Governor Rod Blagojevich today announced the awarding of an *Opportunity Returns* planning grant as a part of a program designed to arm workers with new skills and prepare them to fill jobs in industries facing critical shortages in skilled labor. The City of Rockford/Rock River Training will receive almost **\$170,000** under the Critical Skills Shortage Initiative (CSSI). The Critical Skills Shortage Initiative is a vital component of the Governor's *Opportunity Returns* plan for the Northern Stateline region: to build a more dynamic and highly skilled workforce by strengthening education and job training. The Northern Stateline region is comprised of four counties and includes two workforce investment boards that are partnering together in this initiative: Local Workforce Investment Board 3 of Winnebago and Boone counties, and Local Workforce Investment Board 4, which covers Ogle and Stephenson counties.

"This *Opportunity Returns* grant plays a vital role in our goal of building a more dynamic and highly-skilled workforce in the Northern Stateline region because it provides a window into the landscape of tomorrow's job market. By identifying the industries that will be faced with shortages in skilled labor, we can use training funds in the most efficient and effective manner possible to give workers the skills that the job market is demanding. We are matching the skills of workers with the needs of business and, in doing so, fueling economic growth across the Northern Stateline region," Governor Blagojevich said.

Through a group of local stakeholders, which includes the private sector-led Local Workforce Investment Board, other area employers, economic development professionals, educators and service providers, the *Opportunity Returns* planning grant will be used to identify industry sectors, and specific occupations within those sectors, where there are current or projected shortages of skilled workers. Once these industries and occupations have been selected, the group will work to determine the root causes of these skill shortages and then develop regional solutions to address them.

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) is administering the Critical Skills Shortage Initiative (CSSI). A second component of CSSI is a training phase, where DCEO will competitively award \$15 million over two years in federal Workforce Investment Act funds to help bridge the gap in training services available to fill these occupations. In addition, DCEO administers other workforce programs that might help in fulfilling regional solutions, including the Employer Training Investment Program, the Eliminate the Digital Divide Program, the Job Training for Economic Development Program and a School-to-Work Program.

(more)

“To successfully prepare our workers to thrive in the 21st century economy, we need to have a detailed understanding of local business and industry and the direction they are headed. The Critical Skills Shortage Initiative employs the expertise of area professionals with a first-hand understanding of the regional labor market and uses their direction to craft a highly customized job training program that will give workers the set of skills most in demand in today’s and tomorrow’s workplace. The Governor is successfully redefining the way workforce development should function in our new economy,” DCEO Director Jack Lavin said.

In order to create more high-paying jobs and help businesses grow throughout the state, Governor Blagojevich believes that workforce development must be better linked with economic development. To meet this crucial goal, the Governor has consolidated several workforce programs into DCEO, the state’s economic development agency.

The *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 region was the product of significant outreach over several months with business, civic and labor leaders, and elected officials. *Opportunity Returns* contains tangible actions to make each region more accessible, more marketable, more entrepreneurial and more attractive to business. The 30 specific projects that the Governor announced last October for Northern Stateline region 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.

Interview will be available at www.state.il.us/iisradio/ori.htm

#####