



# opportunityreturns

*Creating more jobs for today and tomorrow*

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Rod R. Blagojevich – Governor

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 14, 2004

**news**

### 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 IMPORTANT JOB TRAINING GRANT FOR SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY-CARBONDALE

CARBONDALE - Governor Rod Blagojevich announced today a **\$72,000** *Opportunity Returns* workforce-training grant to Southern Illinois University-Carbondale's (SIUC) Office of Economic and Regional Development. The OERD office, which delivers training services to a number of Illinois companies across the state, will use the funding to train over **300** employees in critical 21<sup>st</sup> century job skills such as computer competencies, proficiency in new software programs, and e-commerce development - as well as in accounting and management training. Strengthening job training for Illinois workers is one of the major priorities of the Governor's innovative *Opportunity Returns* initiative - the historic, regional economic development plan that he rolled out for Southern Illinois during his visit to SIUC last November.

"Southern Illinois University-Carbondale is a critical economic resource for this community and the entire region. It has trained thousands of business owners and employees, created countless jobs, and secured vital loans for local businesses to expand. But there is still much to be done. Giving employees the skills they need to do their jobs more efficiently and effectively is the best way to help companies grow and, ultimately, attract even more businesses to the area. SIUC is a perfect partner for ensuring that this region's workforce is prepared to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow and help Southern Illinois reach its economic potential," Governor Blagojevich said.

SIUC is one of three universities in Illinois that host Illinois Manufacturing Extension Centers (IMECs). Funded by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), the IMECs are resource centers that provide engineering and business technical assistance to small and medium sized companies to help them become more competitive. With many manufacturers now making investments in new software programs to improve their efficiency and meet customer demand, they are often left with addressing the very difficult challenge of how to bring their workforce up to speed in a computer language they often have never before spoken. IMECs provide an invaluable solution by facilitating critical training in these new software applications, going on site to businesses located in virtually all corners of the state.

The primary grant recipient of the ETIP award will be Schutt Sports in Litchfield, a leading manufacturer in the area and the anchor of a regional sporting and athletic goods manufacturing operation. Schutt Sports' employees will be trained in using Epicor Avante software, an innovative software program designed for mid-market companies with complex manufacturing environments. Three other Schutt subsidiaries, including one based in Marion County, will also participate in the training program.

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“Manufacturers in Southern Illinois must be armed with the all of the necessary tools to compete in this global economy. Training our workers using the most advanced and innovative technologies is essential for these businesses to survive and thrive. Through this kind of training grant, the Governor is ensuring that our workforce is ready for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond,” said DCEO Director Jack Lavin.

The grant to SIUC is 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 “21<sup>st</sup> 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.

“This training grant will allow these companies to use new software applications that will enable their businesses to become more efficient and more profitable, and will ultimately retain and create more jobs in the Southern Illinois region,” said Dr. Raymond Lenzi, Associate Chancellor for Economic Development at SIU-Carbondale.

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 45 specific projects that the Governor announced in November for Southern 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.

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