



# opportunityreturns

Creating more jobs for today and tomorrow

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Rod R. Blagojevich – Governor

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 15, 2004

news

### 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 IMPORTANT PLANNING GRANT TO STRENGTHEN WORKER SKILLS IN THE SOUTHERN 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 in the Southern region with new skills and prepare them to fill jobs in industries facing critical shortages in skilled labor. MAN-TRA-CON in Marion will receive close to **\$157,000** through the Critical Skills Shortage Initiative (CSSI). The Critical Skills Shortage Initiative is a vital component in the Governor's *Opportunity Returns* plan for the Southern region: to build a more dynamic and highly skilled workforce by strengthening education and job training. The Southern region is comprised of nineteen counties and includes two workforce investment boards that are partnering together in this initiative: Southern Illinois Workforce Investment Board 25 and Southern 14 Workforce Investment Board 26.

“The Critical Skills Shortage Initiative is really about having a vision of what opportunities tomorrow’s job market will present in the Southern region, and then giving our workers a set of skills that will position them to capitalize on those opportunities. This new approach is the best way to not only ensure that high-paying, quality jobs are available to this region’s workforce, but that the evolving needs of local businesses are continually met,” Governor Blagojevich said.

Through a group of local stakeholders, which includes the private sector-led Local Workforce Investment Boards, 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)

“The Governor’s vision to link workforce development with economic development is right on the mark because it places business and labor leaders together at the same table to craft regional solutions to skill shortages. This program is finding an innovative way to ensure that our current and future workers have the skills they need to fill jobs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century 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 Southern region is a product of significant outreach over several months with business, civic and labor leaders, and elected officials. The more than 40 specific projects that the Governor announced in November for the Southern 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](http://www.state.il.us/iisradio/ori.htm)

#####