



opportunityreturns

Creating more jobs for today and tomorrow

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Rod R. Blagojevich – Governor

news

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GOVERNOR ANNOUNCES MORE VALUABLE JOB TRAINING GRANTS FOR THE ROCK RIVER VALLEY REGION

SPRINGFIELD – Governor Rod Blagojevich today announced the awarding of two new workforce-training grants in the Northern Stateline region as a part of his regional economic development plan, *Opportunity Returns*.

Forest City Gear, a manufacturer of precision gears for the automotive and aerospace industries, will receive a **\$21,000** grant to train employees in operational excellence or ultra-efficient manufacturing. The Roscoe based company has over 900 diversified customers spanning the globe-and beyond. Clients include Harley Davidson, Cessna, Mercury Outboard, and even NASA, which recently used Forest City Gear parts to construct its twin robot geologists, the Mars Exploration Rovers, which landed on the red planet in January. An estimated **36** employees will receive over 240 hours of combined training.

Rockwell Fastener, Inc., a Japanese manufacturer that primarily produces bolts for the automobile industry, will receive over **\$11,000** in funding to train employees in an environmental management system. The Rockford company, which counts Honda and Mitsubishi among its main customers, has grown rapidly since its birth in 1989, seeing its sales grow from \$10.5 million in 1995 to \$36.5 million last year. With Daimler Chrysler and Robert Bosch soon becoming new customers, the manufacturer expects its impressive growth to continue. Over **120** employees will take part in the training.

“In Illinois today, and indeed throughout our country, the manufacturing industry is facing a very formidable challenge. But the challenge is not insurmountable. Manufacturing businesses can remain viable and productive, but they must operate more efficiently than ever before. This *Opportunity Returns* program is vital to manufacturers because it allows them to invest in their workforce to ensure that it is as productive and efficient as possible. Here in the Northern Stateline, the manufacturing industry has started to show positive signs of growth and recovery. These grants will help the industry continue that recovery and make the region more economically competitive,” Governor Blagojevich said.

The grants are being awarded through the Employer Training Investment Program’s (ETIP) Small/Mid-sized Company component and will be used to upgrade the skills of over **150** employees in total. 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 percent of the costs of training their employees.

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“During these challenging economic times, many companies do not have the financial wherewithal to pour resources back into their business to ensure its future stability and productivity. But a company’s human capital is too great a resource to overlook. These two grants will invest in training for over 150 employees of local manufacturers, strengthening the overall caliber of the workforce in the Northern Stateline region and positioning it for future economic growth,” said DCEO Director Jack Lavin.

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 is a product of significant outreach over several months throughout each region, with business, civic and labor leaders, and elected officials. The 30 specific projects that Governor Blagojevich outlined for the Northern Stateline region in October are designed to be flexible and effective. Each plan is tailored to deliver real results that local businesses will see, feel, and, hopefully, profit from.

Four other Rockford businesses have been named recipients of these *Opportunity Returns* grants to date. Roper Whitney, Inc., of Rockford is receiving close to **\$49,000** to help train all **97** of its employees; Rockford Ball Screw Co. is being awarded nearly **\$23,000** to help upgrade the skills of **25** employees; Goodwill Abilities Center of Rockford is receiving almost **\$60,000** to train an estimated **320** employees of six different area companies; and Rock Valley College is receiving a grant for over **\$48,000** to train **90** employees at four companies. The six ETIP grants extended to the Northern Stateline region under *Opportunity Returns* thus far total nearly **\$212,000** and will train almost **700** workers.

Interviews will be available at www.state.il.us/iisradio/extras.htm

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