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Rod Blagojevich – Governor

news

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## **GOV. BLAGOJEVICH ANNOUNCES MORE THAN \$50,000 IN FUNDING FOR INNOVATIVE BOOT CAMP AIMED AT ENHANCING QUALITY OF WORKFORCE AND INCREASING COMPETITIVENESS OF REGION'S MANUFACTURERS**

CHICAGO – In an aggressive effort to strengthen the competitiveness of manufacturers throughout the Northern Stateline region by ensuring they have a steady pipeline of skilled labor, Gov. Rod Blagojevich today announced more than **\$50,000** in *Opportunity Returns* funding for an innovative new initiative called the Manufacturing Boot Camp. The program is providing high school graduates (or those with a GED equivalent), aged 18 – 24, with intense, thirteen-week training and instruction on basic skills that will help them prepare for manufacturing employment. This grant is a part of the Governor's *Opportunity Returns* program for the Northern Stateline region, his comprehensive, pro-active plan for creating jobs and spurring economic growth across the region and throughout the state.

“Manufacturing is still the backbone of the Rock River Valley region. But to face the challenges of today's global economy head-on, it is absolutely critical that we continue to devise new ways to help our manufacturers increase their efficiency, their productivity and their competitiveness. By working to ensure that the industry has a deep, talented pool of labor it can rely on, the Manufacturing Boot Camp will act as one important device in accomplishing that, while it also uniquely positions the region's emerging workforce to succeed in well-paying jobs over the long-term,” said Gov. Blagojevich.

The customized Boot Camp curriculum includes classes on workplace communication, applied mathematics, teamwork, safety, blueprint reading, problem solving, critical thinking and business writing. An introduction to modern manufacturing techniques (quality systems, technology, lean processes) will precede the classroom training. Boot Camp graduates will be provided with 4-week internship training opportunities (160 work hours) and be paid \$9.00 per hour.

The Boot Camp project is a collaboration between the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), Illinois Manufacturing Extension Center (IMEC), and Rock Valley College. The program was initially conceived at a roundtable discussion of manufacturers hosted this summer by DCEO Director Jack Lavin and IMEC, which came as part of *Opportunity Returns*' aggressive outreach effort to identify the region's most pressing challenges and highest priorities.

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IMEC, a non-profit economic consulting organization that works with manufacturers to be more efficient, was tabbed by DCEO to create and manage the program due in part to its locations and relationships with manufacturers throughout Illinois. Another pilot program is slated in the Peoria area.

“Boot Camp is an innovative approach to preparing a new generation of workers to succeed in jobs in the manufacturing industry. We’re delivering a very focused academic foundation that every employee needs to be productive”, said Nina Crick, Director of Business Outreach for Rock Valley College. “Through this vital partnership with the state, our instructors have put together an excellent curriculum that integrates basic skills with specific challenges one might actually encounter when working in a manufacturing environment.”

Local manufacturers are being recruited to host internships for the program graduates. At the conclusion of the internship, candidates may be offered full-time positions.

“We’re always looking for innovative ways to prepare our workforce to compete and thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century economy. The Manufacturing Boot Camp will provide our young workers with training in a highly-valued set of skills that they can parlay into good jobs and brighter futures; and, in doing so, lays the foundation for a stronger, more vibrant manufacturing industry with the capacity to act as an economic engine of growth region-wide,” DCEO Director Jack Lavin said.

Boot Camp begins January 10, 2005. For information, call 815-921-2071, visit [www.mfgbootcamp.com](http://www.mfgbootcamp.com), or attend a free information session on either December 2, 2004, or January 5, 2005, from 6:00 – 8:00pm, at Rock Valley College - Woodward Technology Center, Rooms 141-142.

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 is a 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.

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