

Making the Grade

Goodwill Partners with Community Colleges to Train People for In-Demand Jobs

BY MANDY MIKULENCAK

It's no secret why many Goodwill® agencies count community colleges among their most successful collaborators in moving people into the workforce. The 1,200 community colleges in the United States are particularly suited to help students adapt to a changing labor market.

A July 2009 *Time* magazine article describes the agile nature of community colleges and their ability to tack quickly in changing winds: They can respond immediately to industry trends and get students in and out and ready to work fast — a goal shared by Goodwill Industries®.

20 Years and Growing Strong

In 2009, **Goodwill Industries of Northwest North Carolina** (Winston-Salem) helped educate more than 3,000 students through a partnership with Forsyth Technical Community College. Although the partnership has been in place for 20 years, it's grown substantially in recent years, allowing the Goodwill to train individuals in fields where job opportunities exist.

"Job placement is our business," says Sherry Carpenter, vice president of workforce development. "We want our participants trained in areas where they can go to work quickly."

Both Goodwill and Forsyth Tech benefit through resource sharing. The Goodwill has expanded its training space, which now includes a state-of-the-art welding lab, and Forsyth Tech provides the instructors who can train for high-demand positions such as personal care assistants, certified nursing assistants, phlebotomists, skilled office and customer service staff, cake decorators, and trade jobs in welding, construction, HVAC, electrical and more.

Carpenter says all students are screened so that they aren't set up for failure.

"We want to be sure they can complete the work academically," she says. "We may have to provide support services to help them reach their goals."

By attending classes on-site at the Goodwill, which is conveniently located near public transportation, students find the support they need more readily. More than half of the 3,000 students who attended last year also accessed support services that made it possible for them to continue their education — services such as GED classes, access to transportation, and soft skills training in time management, communication and conflict resolution.

The Goodwill's Business Advisory Council (BAC), the local Workforce Investment Board (WIB) and the JobLink program often present ideas for new class offerings. Goodwill employees then analyze data from a variety of sources

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— Sherry Carpenter, Vice President of Workforce Development
Goodwill Industries of Northwest North Carolina



Ray Smith has mastered a variety welding skills through the Winston-Salem Goodwill's partnership with Forsyth Tech.



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to determine skills most sought after by employers. The JobsNow: 12 in 6 Initiative, launched by Gov. Bev Perdue (D-NC), also drives class offerings. The initiative targets 12 career growth areas, primarily in health care and technical fields, where training lasts six months or less.

One recently identified need was for skilled welders. The first class started in May 2010, and 35 students have been trained or are currently training to be welders. In one BAC meeting, two business members mentioned how hard it is for them to find cake decorators. Soon thereafter, a cake decorating class was developed to fit this specialized need.

Carpenter says some of the training offered results in stackable credentials. For example, students can train for four weeks to become personal care attendants. After they find jobs and are stabilized financially, they can continue their training, often in the evenings, to become certified nursing assistants or phlebotomists.

Other areas in need of skilled workers are the trade industries like carpentry, HVAC, electrical and welding. Carpenter notes that as more people retire out of jobs, younger workers aren't selecting those fields. "But we can tell them, 'Here's a way to make a living wage in this economy.'"

Future plans for the partnership include the expanded training space that will house a health care lab for the extended nursing program. Classes in electronic medical records and coding are also on tap as well as customer service training targeted to call center jobs.

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Good Careers Academy a Model of Success

The Good Careers Academy, a program of **Goodwill Industries of San Antonio** (TX), is built on a successful partnership with Alamo Colleges, a consortium of several community colleges in the region.

Since September 2009, the Good Careers Academy has offered classes that lead to a variety of certifications such as pharmacy technician, medical assistant, certified nursing assistant, computer support specialist and accounting/payroll clerk. The classrooms are housed at two Goodwill locations that are convenient for students. Alamo Colleges provide the instructors, and Goodwill handles the rest — including recruitment, admissions, financial aid, case management, and job placement, says Mark Milton, director of people services for the San Antonio Goodwill.

Tuition ranges from \$700 to \$3,500, but the agency secured a local City of San Antonio stimulus grant that covers up to 90 percent of tuition costs for students who are eligible. To date, approximately 200 students have been trained for high-demand occupations, with more than 70 percent now employed in high-demand occupations.

An industry advisory council also plays a key role in the program. Goodwill Industries of San Antonio developed a council of employer partners in the health care and information technology industries. The council educates Goodwill about occupations that are in demand as well as the hiring needs of each employer. The advisory council is instrumental in providing internships for Good Careers Academy students and hiring graduates after program completion.



Partners include CVS, H-E-B, health care providers, assisted living communities and local hospitals.

Students hear about the classes in several ways, including agency referrals, Goodwill job fairs, public service announcements, fliers and word of mouth. The partner colleges also advertise the Goodwill classes and refer students to the Goodwill locations. Students of all ages and backgrounds are attracted to the training. Some are unemployed and looking for jobs while others have only a high school education and want skills to progress into better paying careers.

“We can always get someone a job, but we’d rather put them on a career path instead,” Milton says.

In the News – The ROI of Funding Community Colleges

The nation’s 1,200 community colleges train 59 percent of new nurses, and they also crank out wind-farm technicians and video-game designers — jobs that, despite ballooning unemployment overall, abound for adequately skilled workers. Community-college graduates earn up to 30 percent more than high school grads, a boon that helps state and local governments reap a 16-percent return on every dollar they invest in community colleges. U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan declared in March 2009 that two-year schools “will play a big role in getting America back on its feet again.” (Source: *Time* magazine, July 20, 2009, *Can Community Colleges Save the U.S. Economy?*)

Building Futures through Skills Training



Instructor Thomas Elijah helps Shaka Greene and Joseph Chambers build new skills for careers in construction.

For 20 years, program participants at **Goodwill Industries of the Southern Piedmont** (Charlotte, NC) have accessed adult basic education and other skill-building courses at Central Piedmont Community College.

Joy Fortune, director of workforce development services, says that the community college and Goodwill share an interest in serving adults with low incomes, and have complementary capacities and resources to implement new adult training and education methods that can move people into career-building jobs.

Fortune says the Goodwill sees the partnership as an effective way to provide

an array of course offerings to program participants without the expense of establishing in-house courses or duplicating the ones offered at the college. Additionally, the Goodwill provides wrap-around services to those students who often face barriers that could prevent them from completing their courses.

One of the successful certificate programs is construction training, which began in December 2007. To date, 182 students have completed the training that takes place at Goodwill’s Career Development Center.

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— Joy Fortune, Director of Workforce Development Services
Goodwill Industries of the Southern Piedmont

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Because health care jobs are also in high demand in the surrounding county, students can now access a pharmacy technician program at Central Piedmont Community College. The first class began on August 30 and is held on the college campus. Market information drove the decision to offer the course, but so did input

from a community employer. The human resources department at CVS explained its need for certified pharmacy techs and, in time, trained Goodwill program participants will fill that need.

“Each year brings new challenges for our workforce, and strong partnerships allow

us to develop new solutions and grow the best asset: our people,” Fortune says. “Our joint venture with the community college demonstrates our serious commitment to workforce development.” ■



Tools of the Trade

Keith Thompson discovered what it was like to become a statistic in 2009. Like thousands of people in the construction industry nationwide, Thompson lost his job.

“Being laid off was rough for me. It was pretty much like being dead,” Thompson says about losing his tile and fireplace job.

The 35-year-old’s biggest concern was supporting his wife and three children. A possible solution came when he overheard someone talking about the construction training program at Goodwill Industries of the Southern Piedmont (Charlotte, NC).

Thompson quickly saw the benefits of enrolling in the program, including OSHA recertification, knowledge of green construction, tips on improving his interview skills, and job placement assistance.

Shortly after he graduated in late 2009, Carolinas Consolidated Services hired him to work at construction sites all over the Carolinas doing mold remediation and insulation.

“Goodwill gave me the tools I need to survive in today’s economy. I tell anyone and everyone about Goodwill now,” he says.

