

\$4.89 million grant to benefit local workforce

Summit unites Giddings, Blinn, Workforce Training

Job training for today's workforce is coming to Giddings, and Blinn College will be part of it.

A \$4.89 million grant has been awarded to the Smithville Workforce Training Center, which will help roll out training scholarships and facilities in Lee, Fayette, and Bastrop Counties.

That's the special announcement Economic Development Corporation President David Stedman has been keeping under his belt the past several weeks. The good news

came as part of the Giddings Workforce Summit held Monday, Nov. 14 at the Silos Event Center. Dozens of local business owners joined dignitaries from Blinn College, Texas Workforce Commission, Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area, the Chamber of Commerce, and local officials to take a positive step in the area's future.

"Workforce is a major issue of concern to cities throughout Texas and across the nation, but the small city of Giddings

is determined to turn it into a regional strength," says Stedman. "With help from Texas Workforce Commissioner Aaron Demmerson and Texas State Senator Lois Kolkhorst, Giddings has partnered with the Chancellor and Leadership of Blinn College to forge a new multi-million initiative."

"We get to bring training here through their funding," stated Chamber Executive Director Denice Harlan, who helped facilitate the Workforce Sum-

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BENEFIT

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mit. "Across the U.S., only 32 communities got money, and Smithville Workforce Training got \$4.8 million of the \$12 million that was awarded."

How it works

Stewart Burns, program coordinator of the Smithville Workforce Training Center, adds, "The \$4.8 million is being administered by Workforce Solutions Rural Capital. The money will be disseminated to us on a periodic basis. As we develop programs and identify them, they will send the money to us."

"Workforce has identified a number of viable jobs and needs," he continued. "For example, we have a need for 120 CDL drivers in Lee, Bastrop, and Fayette Counties. We know of that 120, the biggest number is going to come from Lee County." Burns went on to explain the grant money will help pay tuition for those who enroll in CDL training.

April Daniels, the Workforce Training Center's executive director, told the audience there are three pathways identified through this grant: skill trades; medical support; and IT training. "That is absolutely where we need to be training our workforce," she says. "All of the employers across our

the border crisis?

What happens over the next two years may indeed decide how the Presidential Election plays out. If the polls continue to be as wrong then as they were this election, it will again be the undecided voters who determine who will be our next President!

three counties who need welders, plumbers, electricians, HVAC technicians, as well as IT. It's a massive need across our rural communities."

But the plan doesn't end there. The cities themselves are responsible for providing training facilities and helping with recruitment. "We pay the bill," says Burns. "We have the facilities secured here in Lee County, and we can bring the training based upon those needs here."

Blinn steps in

Lee and Fayette Counties are in partnership with Blinn College, while Bastrop is partnering with ACC. Blinn's role will be to furnish the educational providers. Again, the \$4.8 million grant will help pay for this arrangement.

Burns says local business must sign on with the project before-hand, agreeing to hire the people coming out of the training programs. "It's not that we have to only train them, but we have to place them. It's going to take a lot of agreements on the part of businesses, along with a lot of people doing the training to prevent attrition. At the end of the day in 3 years, we need 477 people in the workplace."

Dr. Mary Hensley, the district chancellor for Blinn College, told the audience, "Local businesses now have the opportunities to upgrade your training opportunities for your employees. Blinn College with our five campuses and 18,000 students stand ready to assist you. We have substantial experience in developing programs for your needs here in this county."

By the numbers

According to Paul Fletcher, CEO of Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area, 1,400 Lee

Woman at motel given courtesy ride

Lee County Sheriff's Deputies Stephen Dudley and Jaboris Dickerson responded to a call about someone requesting to meet with a deputy at the Country Inn Motel on Hwy. 77 South in Giddings regarding a welfare concern on Friday, Nov. 4 at 11:25 a.m.

The two deputies and Sgt. Byron Holloway met with the complainant, and Deputy Dickerson gave the woman a courtesy ride to the sheriff's office so she could wait for a ride out of town.

County residents leave the county to go work elsewhere -- mostly to Travis County. Over 900 people leave other counties to come work in Lee.

"The Smithville Workforce Training Center is committed to building a long-lasting infrastructure in our region that will encourage our citizens to stay in our area instead of what they are doing now, which is fleeing to the urban centers for training, and attracting employers who will see a dedicated, trained workforce is available," adds Daniels.

"Existing businesses in the Central Texas region have been discussing the critical need for motivated and trained employees, and prospective new businesses are looking to move to an area that can provide the most productive work force," concludes Stedman. "I'm excited that Senator Kolkhorst and Commissioner Demerson have listened and responded to our business community and engaged with Blinn College and the City of Giddings to form an exciting new working relationship with our business community."