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Apprenticeships Programs growing

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Rebecca Long, left, and Dawn Dovre, with the South Dakota Department of Labor and Regulation, prepare for the Registered Apprenticeships Program signing ceremony and orientation, Friday, Nov. 15, in Pierre's Chamber of Commerce building.

The Registered Apprenticeships Program in South Dakota saw a signing ceremony and orientation, Friday, Nov. 15, in Pierre's Chamber of Commerce building. Almost 50 representatives of businesses and government agencies were in attendance.

"At this point, these businesses do not have apprentices," said Marcia Hultman, secretary of the state Department of Labor and Regulation. "They will spend the next four months developing their programs with the assistance of the Department of Labor and Regulation and the U.S. Department of Labor."

The ceremony and orientation followed the announcement of \$370,000 to be provided by the United States Department of Labor and Regulation in incentive funding to help South Dakota businesses and organizations expand the number of Registered Apprenticeships Programs in the state.

Businesses could each apply for up to a maximum of \$20,000 in funding to help offset the initial start-up costs when developing a new program. For more information on apprenticeships, visit StartTodaySD.com.

"Registered Apprenticeships are a great way for businesses to build a quality workforce with the exact skills they need to fill their openings," said Hultman. "We have a pool of untapped workers ready to learn new skills, and this will expand training opportunities, especially in rural communities."

The programs have been operating for several years now. The recent incentive funding is to help businesses create new apprenticeships. The most recent funding awardees are committing to developing a Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) for their business. Each business develops its own RAP training to meet its needs. The DLR does not have direct oversight of the apprentice training.

"DLR serves as a catalyst to increase training opportunities for our workforce, as well as assisting businesses to develop a proactive workforce development strategy," said Hultman. "So much of what we do today is letting people know what options exist. We have expanded

way beyond what the options used to be. We have the largest job listing in the state. At this moment, there are 18,836 job openings in South Dakota. That number is the highest I have ever seen it."

"Still, all you here know the challenges for businesses in finding a skilled workforce," said Hultman. "It takes investment, time and energy. Apprenticeship allows people to learn and work at the same time. You – your businesses – are all becoming miniature technical institutes. The need for plumbers and electricians is advancing to include brewmasters and glassblowers. Because we are a smaller state, we can get things done that are difficult for larger states."

The United States Department of Labor, which provided the extra funds, has a basic framework for businesses to follow and build upon to ensure quality programs. The USDOL approves and reviews the Registered Apprenticeship Program. John Bolger, Pierre, is the state director for the federal DOL office of apprenticeship.

"Even more progress is planned," said Bolger. "South Dakota received one of the largest amounts this go round. We have 144 apprenticeships, plus what was just registered; for a state of this population that is almost unheard of." Another signing is tentatively planned for next March.

USDOL states it has a 91 percent retention rate with the same business of RAP completers. In other words, almost all of the apprentices continue working for the business that train them. According to DOL, the trained workforce (the apprentices) gives registered apprenticeship business sponsors (their trainers) a \$1.47 return on investment. Last year, 17

new pre-apprenticeships and registered apprenticeship programs were developed in South Dakota. These programs are currently training over 40 pre-apprentices and registered apprentices.

Incentive funding recipients, occupations and funding award include:

Aberdeen: 3M – machine operator; Allevity – family entertainment center manager; Banner Engineering (and Huron) – electrical and electronic equipment assemblers.

Deadwood: Mind Blown Studio – hot glass gaffer.

Dell Rapids: Dell Rapids Veterinary – veterinary lab animal technician.

Huron: Huron Regional Medical Center – respiratory therapist (\$10,000).

Madison: S.D. Funeral Directors Association – funeral director.

Midland: A to Z Technology – animal care specialist.

Mitchell: AKG – welder and CNC operator; Mabee Eye Clinic – paraoptometric technician.

Rapid City: Black Hills Works – direct support professional; Hot Rod Institute – automotive restoration technician; Lester Robbins – concrete construction form setter; TelNet PC – computer bench technician.

Sioux Falls: Claims Associates – claims adjuster; Howe Inc. – mechatronics aHVAC technicians (\$10,000).

Spearfish: Foltz and Sons – electrician and HVAC technician.

Sturgis: The Kitchen at Bear Butte Gardens – commercial kitchen manager.

Vermillion: Masaba – manufacturing assembly electrician.

Watertown & Huron: Lake Area Technical Institute and Terex – field services technician and shop services technician (\$10,000)