

# Program measures ability of entry-level job seekers

BRIDGETON NEWS

Monday, November 20, 2006

By Jaime Marine, Staff Writer

MILLVILLE A program that defines, measures and certifies that jobseekers have the knowledge, skills and abilities they need to succeed in an entry-level job is being tested in Cumberland County.

Known as the National Work Readiness Credential, the program, which administers tests via computer, is currently in its soft launch phase, meaning area employers can have their current employees evaluated at no cost at the county's One-Stop Career Center on North Delsea Drive, Vineland.

Dante Rieti, executive director of the Cumberland/Salem Workforce Investment Board, told business owners and the public about this opportunity earlier this week during a Millville Chamber of Commerce luncheon.

"The credential will designate jobseekers who can carry out essential entry-level work tasks," he said, adding these are things like communication skills, interpersonal skills, decision-making skills and lifelong learning skills.

He said about 40 percent of job applicants lack the basic skills necessary to do entry-level work.

Rieti said there are also skill deficiencies in the current employee pool, noting about 59 percent of that pool has inadequate basic skills, 32 percent has poor reading and writing skills and 22 percent has the inability to work in a team environment.

"Keeping entry-level employees in the job is a difficult task," he said, adding the goal of this program is to bridge the skills gap currently existing throughout the country." (The program) helps you to see if (the employees) have the capability to move up the career ladder."

The National Work Readiness Credential Assessment focuses on the application of knowledge and skills in work-appropriate settings by administering a three- to four-hour computerized test that assesses if the test-taker has the needed skills for entry-level employment.

Those taking part in the credential are tested on reading with understanding, using math to solve problems, oral language and situational judgment.

"This is not a typical reading and math test," Rieti said, noting the questions pertain to these skills in relation to the job.

The assessment is done on a pass/fail basis and those who pass receive a certificate, which can be used in any state that recognizes the program.

He said the benefits for the employers include reduced recruitment costs, improved productivity, minimized turnover and maximized effectiveness of on-the-job-training.

As for the job seekers, Rieti said they will be able to demonstrate to employers they have skills to successfully perform their jobs, identify the skills they may need to strengthen and advance in the workplace.

Also, employers taking part in the soft launch will be able to provide direct feedback on the program and its validity.

The assessment is open to any current full- or part-time entry-level employee hired in the last eight to nine months.

By early next year, the program is looking to begin its full, nationwide launch, at which time they can then test potential employees, youth or others participating in internships, job shadowing, work study or other programs, and workers employed through a temporary agency.

The program will then produce a pool of qualified applicants who are ready for entry into the workplace.

After its full launch, the test will cost about \$65.

For more information on the test, contact Sandi Scalese, supervising employment specialist, at (856) 696-5660, ext. 211.