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FutureMakers is designed to raise the number of post-secondary degrees and certifications to meet needs of a regional workforce.

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Editorial

Building a workforce future that makes sense

THE NEWS-PRESS EDITORIAL BOARD

Recently, The News-Press editorial board listened to a committed group of business professionals and community leaders dedicated to elevating the education level of students, who then infuse their knowledge and skills to build a stronger workforce throughout Southwest Florida.

The group is appropriately titled the FutureMakers Coalition – inspired and created through the Southwest Florida Community Foundation. Its regional mission is to increase the number of post-secondary degrees and industry certifications to meet the growing demands of business, which for years has implored local educators to seed local talent with specific skills so they don't have to take the time and spend the money to find that talent

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2013 BASELINE REPORT
Southwest Florida high school graduation rates

Year	No economic disadvantage	Economic disadvantage
2013	83 percent	70 percent
2014	85 percent	70 percent
2015	85 percent	72 percent

Source: Florida Department of Education

Average hourly wages

Year	Southwest Florida	State
2013	\$18.05	\$20.99
2014	\$18.34	\$21.54
2015	\$19.03	\$22.23

Source: Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, Bureau of Labor

Top college degrees and certificates sought by SWFL businesses

- » Bachelor's in business management: **63 percent**
- » Associate's in business administration and management: **61 percent**
- » Bachelor's in organizational leadership and supervision: **53 percent**
- » Bachelor's in accounting: **48 percent**
- » Bachelor's in marketing: **47 percent**
- » Associate's in supervision and management: **47 percent**
- » Associate's in accounting technology: **45 percent**
- » Associate's in business computer technology: **45 percent**

Source: 2016 FMC Workforce Survey

To view 2013 Baseline Report, go to futuremakerscoalition.com/reports/

COMMENTARY

Advice for new dads: stay for the long haul



Dan Warner
A NEIGHBOR'S VIEW

Abner Warner took his 6-year-old daughter, Bernice, down to the Scioto River, lifted her to his shoulder and threw her as far out into the water as he could.

Two summers later, he did the same with Helen, his second daughter.

The girls squealed with delight, floundered their way to shore, then splashed back into midstream, secure in the knowledge that they had just learned to swim, daddy's way.

Helen was my mother and I know the story because the sisters talked about it, laughed about it, even when

they were old ladies.

Abner was a small man, but a strong and hard-working farmer, literally working himself to death when the girls were not yet adolescents. One morning he went out, hefted about a dozen fence posts to his shoulder and felt something snap in his neck. He lingered about a week, then died. So the girls grew up with their mother, the three of them continuing to work the farm until they sold it and moved to the city so the girls could go to college.

The two remembered their father with affection, though, as stoic farm girls, they never talked about their loss.

I, too, grew up fatherless. My father left home when my eldest brother, Tony, was 9. I was 5 days old. Dear old dad was a drunken bum. Tony and I always harbored the illogical hope that he would someday straighten up, fly

right and become an important part of our lives. Our three siblings, not so much. Each of us found our own way to cope, with differing degrees of success.

Then it was my turn to be a father. It happened early in our marriage and neither Janet nor I had any idea about parenting, except what she had learned as a home economics major.

The second day of fatherhood was one of the worst. Our new baby, a girl, was suddenly wheezing, breathing hard and, it seemed, having a great deal of trouble just surviving. We lived in a small town, knew our family doctor well and rushed her to his office rather than a hospital.

It took him about five seconds to diagnose her. She was allergic to milk, he said. He told us to nurse her with soy milk. Her breathing returned to normal before the day was over.

Guiding the kids through the tough times is a solid part of the joy of parenting. Things work out, if you keep plugging along.

Next week our son is to undergo some surgery on his shoulder. He describes it as minor, in and out the same day as they do in these times. Recovery, the docs say, will take some weeks of sleepless nights.

I am nervous about it. Worried and anxious about the unknown and the possibility of great pain.

It's the same feeling I had 57 years ago when our daughter was wheezing in her crib.

So, new fathers, know this: The worry never ends, nor does the joy. Stay around for it.

Pulitzer Prize-winning editor Dan Warner writes a weekly column for The News-Press. Reach him at djwarner1@yahoo.com.



COMMENTARY

Data helps build strong FutureMakers in community



Tessa LeSage
GUEST OPINION

Fort Myers is my hometown. It's where I attended pre-, elementary, middle and high school. I was a first-generation college student and eventually earned a master's degree at Florida Gulf Coast University. I am a Southwest Floridian, a mother of two and a FutureMaker.

FutureMakers are residents, advocates, business leaders, educators and students who are working together to use data and experience to find ways to ensure the system, from cradle to career, produces the workforce needed today and into the future.

Each of us influence our community narratives, sometimes missing how things change or how our story may differ from our neighbors' or those

living in another zip code. These narratives are important, but there is value in broadening our understanding to a regional level in order to detect trends, secure needed resources and continuously improve our quality of life in a sustainable way.

Born from data and dialogue among a handful of stakeholders, the FutureMakers Coalition has grown to more than 230 partners from business, education, government, nonprofits and philanthropy since 2014. There are FutureMakers in Glades, Hendry, Collier, Lee and Charlotte counties working collectively to achieve a shared goal to transform the workforce in Southwest Florida.

Data continues to be a cornerstone of the coalition's work. It is used as a flashlight, rather than a hammer, to point each of us toward opportunities to improve our region's workforce and economy. FutureMakers have spent the last year collecting and analyzing baseline data around 15 regional outcomes. The result is the FutureMakers Coalition

2013 Baseline Report. The Coalition chose 2013 because that was the year before Southwest Florida's FutureMakers truly began to align their work around the shared goal. The report is a powerful tool for understanding where we were before unifying our efforts and establishes the baseline from which the coalition will measure the collective impact of our work going forward.

Through the year-long process of developing the report together, we learned that data can be surprising, reflecting insight beyond the stories. The effort started many on-going conversations, as we begin to determine how we understand the "why" of what the data illustrates.

Because of the work to date, we have honed the Coalition's 2013 estimate of the working-age Southwest Floridian's (25-64 years old) who hold a degree, certificate or other high-quality credential from 27 to 37 percent.

The baseline report reveals a new goal of transforming the workforce by

increasing the number of Southwest Floridians with degrees, certificates or other high-quality credentials to 55 percent by 2025.

The baseline report is a resource for the region. It reflects challenges in early childhood education, graduation rates, and equity and poverty. Simultaneously, it shines a light on an array of opportunities to improve the system by working together to increase the quality of business-education partnerships, provide mentors to first-generation students, develop curriculum to improve foundational skills, train to fill positions in high-demand occupations and more.

I'm proud of this region I call home. I'm a FutureMaker and you can be, too.

Tessa LeSage is director of social innovation and sustainability for the Southwest Florida Community Foundation, which serves as the backbone organization for the FutureMakers Coalition.

COMMENTARY

Employers find common ways to build workforce



Michelle Zech
GUEST OPINION

Collaboration on workforce projects among employers has not always been viewed in a positive light.

Employers work in silos due to fear they will lose potential employees if competitors know their plans. Today, we have a low unemployment rate, many under-employed and unemployed, as well as individuals in our community who do not know what employment opportunities are available. Putting a community plan together now is the key to a strong workforce. If we wait, we lose.

Employers are experiencing an aging workforce, and the health care industry is no different. Filling the void of retiring employees who have a great

deal of knowledge and skill is a challenge. One of the ways that we are looking to overcome this is challenge is by brainstorming ways to utilize our retiring workers (mentorship, potential different job roles). We have to ask ourselves how can we retain this knowledge that is leaving our facilities? Another avenue is to ensure that we create a pipeline of new health care employees, creating career paths designed to capture the attention of our school-age population, individuals attaining their GED and individuals who are learning English as a second language. Presenting and gaining the interest at the middle school level is imperative.

At Lee Health, we have learned that to fill our critical need positions we must work together with our employers and community partners to identify and develop programs beneficial for all of us. As an example, Lee Health was experiencing a high number of Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) openings.

We needed to think outside the box so we reached out to our FutureMakers Coalition Partners, the Southwest Florida Community Foundation, CareerSource Southwest Florida, Fort Myers Technical College and Cape Coral Technical College, to help us find a solution. Through collaboration, a pathway was created to reduce the barriers to education and funding for those interested in becoming a CNA. Interested applicants are now triaged and appropriate funding provided for those interested in a CNA career; the colleges provide the training, and the employers conduct interviews and offer potential employment. This program not only assisted in decreasing Lee Health's CNA openings, but also those of other health care employers across Lee County.

Early on in the process, we questioned why we, and other employers, were working on the same issue, but each in a separate silo. We realized that by aligning with other health care em-

ployers we could build a strong CNA program and replicate this to other needed health care and non-health care certificate programs. The program has been so successful that it is being replicated to include other certification programs both inside and outside of health care. The collaborative goal is to increase the number of individuals with a post-secondary certification in the five-county area.

Further collaboration is needed to address the challenges of employee retention, attainable housing, transportation, foundational soft skills and child care that are barriers for individuals who are seeking employment. The employer collaboration has begun, and we hope it will continue to grow. Collaboration is the key to a successful workforce plan for our area.

Michelle Zech is Human Resources Business Partner Post Acute, Continuum of Care, Corporate, Workforce Planning for Lee Health.

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Editorial

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outside the state.

FutureMakers is driven by dedication and data. That data, from about four years ago when the group first organized, told members that only about 37 percent of working-age residents (25-64) had degrees, certificates or other professional credentials. That wasn't good enough, not for a constantly changing, technology- and data-driven workforce, with specific needs. It's also not good for the economy because if businesses can't find what they need in a skilled workforce in our region, they will move to the talent.

"We have set a goal to transform the workforce in Southwest Florida, said Sarah Owen, executive director of the community foundation.

So by 2025, FutureMakers expects to have 55 percent of the working age population equipped with college diplomas or specialized certifications and skilled enough to fill workforce gaps in a variety of fields. Is it doable? Of course, as long as there is buy-in from the region's universities, colleges, technical schools and businesses. High schools and their specialized curriculum that advance the educational profiles and certification abilities of its students play a key role.

FutureMakers will not make any move toward a stronger workforce without data and analysis to back up its direction. Last week, it released its first "Baseline Report, using data from critical education and workforce categories developed from the time the group first organized - in 2013 - to 2016. The report is designed to show where the need is the greatest in education and in the workforce and to allow the coalition to develop actions plans and projects to meet the five-county region's needs.

Much of the data was compiled from U.S. Census, Department of Education, Department of Health and Workforce Now statistics and through its partnership with the Lumina Foundation. That data will continue to measure progress from what the coalition calls "cradle to career."

A sampling of what FutureMakers knows from the 51-page report:

» The five-county region of Lee, Collier, Charlotte, Hendry and Glades - has a population of about 1.2 million, with about half of that of working age.

» The region produces about 9,568 post-secondary degrees and 1,870 technical certificates annually.

» The region has an average "livable" wage of about \$19 an hour.

» There is a great need to fill about 900 positions in business administration fields.

The improvement goals for the next eight years are robust and courageous - but attainable. Some of the coalition's priorities:

» Increase high school graduation rates in Southwest Florida from about 80 percent to 90 percent. This statistic is important because socioeconomics play a key role. The coalition's research, through the state department of education, shows 5,377 economically disadvantaged students did not graduate on time from 2013-15, compared with 2,447 who were not considered low income.

» Increase post-secondary enrollment in education programs aligned with workforce needs.

» Increase enrollment in technical education from about 36 percent in 2016 to 40.3 in 2017.

» Improve the Free Application for Free Student Aid (FAFSA) completion rate from about 36 percent in 2013 to 40.3 percent this year. Improved FAFSA scores increase the ability for a student to get financial aid for college.

» Increase business-education partnerships.

» Build on the number of local post-secondary graduates employed here - and with living wages.

FutureMakers is not just measuring workforce readiness by what is happening at the college or technical school level. The group of 230 is digging deeper. It is starting at the pre-K level, with a priority of improving reading proficiency by the third grade. According to its report, only 53 percent of the region's third graders reached a satisfactory level on testing. The coalition wants to hit 62 percent because that is what the state department of education requires for a school to get an "A" rating. The state has a tendency to change requirements frequently, but The News-Press editorial board believes that by working with schools,

families and the business community, 62 percent is attainable, by 2025.

Another critical need is improving business and education partnerships in the region. The more students can get hands-on experience in fields where the workforce needs are the greatest, the better it is for the student and local economy. Of the 68 businesses that responded to a survey by the coalition, 40 percent indicated they partner with local post-secondary institutions, especially in recruiting and internships. There is a need, however, for more mentoring, from area businesses to students in need.

But there also is a need for local businesses to improve wages for qualified employees. The coalition learned through its research and data that Southwest Florida is about 15 percent behind the state average for a living wage. The local average is about \$19 an hour, compared to \$22 for the state. Determining a living wage can change by area, depending on the job market, but the information uncovered by the coalition's report should be used as a guide for businesses that wages may not be competitive.

The coalition's workforce survey also focused on matching post-secondary degrees with the most sought-after jobs in the area. Business management and administration degrees were in high demand at about 62 percent. Organizational and leadership and supervisory skills also were priorities - at about 61 percent. Accounting and marketing degrees were next at 53 percent.

Employment gaps are significant in business administration, but also in carpentry with about 400 unfilled positions. There are almost 1,600 attaining bachelor degrees each year that do not have an "easily identifiable employment option" in the region, according to the report.

From all this data, survey information, ongoing partnerships with the business community, as well as high schools and post-secondary institutions, the coalition is focused on meeting the needs for businesses that require trades, healthcare and information technology skills, as well as a proficiency for small business administration. There focus comes with a caveat: those entering the workforce must replace leadership, critical

thinking and specialized skills of those who retired from the workforce. Region businesses said they lost 30 percent in leadership skills and 19 percent in critical thinking skills because of retirement. Those losses should also help colleges better understand workforce concerns, provide a more focused curriculum focused and training opportunities.

Current projects

The coalition has developed projects to help current workforce needs:

Certified nursing assistant pilot project: In partnership with Lee Health, the community foundation staff recognized there were unused scholarship funds for students in nursing, as well as funds available from CareerSource, for low income students. They are getting those funds to the students in need to help fill health system vacancies.

Foundation skills training: Research from Workforce Now indicated local employers were having a hard time hiring and retaining otherwise qualified employees because they were performing poorly on job applications and in interviews. Working with the Horizon Council and Florida South-Western State College, the coalition designed a pilot project to help students acquire the necessary skills to improve their job interview performances.

What should come as good news for Florida university students and for the coalition's goals is that more than 90 percent of students were working within one year of graduation. Full-time employees were earning a median annual salary of \$39,100, according to a report presented to the state university system's Board of Governors. The report included 60,333 graduates from the class of 2015, were using employment and education databases. Engineers were making the most money at \$58,600 with those in performing arts at the low end, getting \$31,300.

FutureMakers and their extensive partnerships are dedicated to aligning more post-education degrees and certifications with workforce needs. Bottom line: Their efforts improve the economic health of the region.

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