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## South Suburbs as talent pool

### Workforce Chicago 2.0 aims to improve worker education, development

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**By Darcel Rockett, The Star**

Workforce Chicago 2.0 is an initiative geared toward helping make Chicago — and the South Suburbs — a prime talent pool in the 21st century economy.

Charles Clutter, marketing director for Workforce Chicago 2.0, said the collaborative initiative run by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, the Human Resources Management Association of Chicago and World Business Chicago is designed to promote private sector investment in the learning and development of employees.

In other words, company investment in continuous education and adult learning both on and off the job for better-prepared and more knowledgeable workers.

"When we started this program three years ago, it was to raise awareness to business leaders that training and allowing their employees to learn is an important thing among the business community to keep it vital," Clutter said.

"Which has been a major point to make as of late with the outsourcing of jobs overseas. If that's happening, jobs are changing, and what are we to do here? The employees have to be retrained and reskilled, and we wanted to engage high-ranking CEOs from big companies to realize that as they change they have to keep up with that."

CAEL measures awareness of the initiative's goals in an annual awards event. Companies in the region who show their commitment in attracting, retaining and growing a qualified labor force in the business community are given plaques by the non-profit group.

The businesses nominate themselves on their employee development practices and the initiative selects the winners who then promote their framework so regional businesses can learn about new models for learning and development services for employees.

This year Northwestern Memorial Hospital was cited for its new academy, which oversees all management development, clinical and other functional education.

And ShoreBank was cited after creating a comprehensive Human Capital Strategic Plan designed to be more responsive to employee's individual development needs.

Previous honorees also include Argonne National Laboratory and University Park's Bimba Manufacturing.

Argonne received accolades for its pre-paid tuition program, onsite customized training and remediation programs and management's role in developing employees, Clutter said.

As for Bimba, Mary Fote, vice president of administration for the south suburban company, said grant funding allowed Bimba to offer 22 training programs for 368 new and incumbent employees in their winning year (2002).

"Bimba's three primary initiatives for training and development concerned quality systems and efforts to eliminate waste and failure costs, building the technical skill level of employees so they can: a) implement the new software systems and thereby increase our operating efficiencies, b) perform their current job responsibilities, and c) acquire new skills for promotions and new technological advances," Fote said.

"The third major initiative is the development of our managers to be better leaders who will, with new information and skills, lead Bimba Manufacturing toward continued growth and competitiveness."

Clutter stressed that all of these businesses have practices to retain talented employees, strategies for transitioning employees to different environments, partnerships with other companies and educational institutions and they all take into consideration the use of new technologies for effective learning as well as the creation of "informal" learning environments.

"Awareness is being created and people, specifically CEOs and other business leaders in companies, are talking about how to help their employees achieve life-long learning," Clutter said. "We've recognized about 15 companies and probably have affected thousands, especially in the current market."

Clutter, who works for the non-profit CAEL, said his organization works with every sector of the business community (excluding individuals) to promote more change, including colleges and human resource departments.

"We want the community colleges to work with businesses, so employees can go to college for training; but we also want colleges to be in tune with what businesses are looking for, so they can tell companies they have people with the skills you're looking for," Clutter said.

Supported by the Chicago Workforce Board, The Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce, The Mayor's Office of Workforce Development, and The Metropolitan Mayors' Caucus, Workforce Chicago 2.0 has gotten everyone talking about the future of their employees.

There's so much talk, that Clutter is hoping the initiative will become a benchmark for all companies in the Chicagoland area.

"Companies have started bragging about being a Chicago Workforce 2.0 company," he said. "When we started out, we were hoping that our principles of adult learning and training would become a benchmark.

"We're sort of hoping it will become the next business benchmark much like ISO 9000 certification has been, where similar principles and quality standards are put into place."

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