**New initiative aims to connect employers and employees**
By Doug Loon

Minnesota’s talented workforce is among our greatest assets and fuels our economy. But our advantage is threatened by a widespread shortage of skilled workers that is expected to hit 239,000 workers by 2022. The problem affects all types and sizes of businesses in every corner of the state, challenging their very ability to stay and grow in our communities.

Recent headlines tell the story.  From Twin Cities Business magazine: “Labor shortage is hurting Minnesota employment growth.” From MinnPost: “In a tight labor market, Minnesota employers look to an under-utilized labor pool: workers with disabilities.” From the St. Cloud Times: “Manufacturers are optimistic about their future, but workforce shortages are still a concern.” From the Minneapolis Star Tribune: “Shortage of skilled workers challenges Twin Cities tech firms.”

The Minnesota Chamber seeks to do more than admire our workforce challenges; we aim to provide solutions. That’s why we have launched the Center for Workforce Solutions, a first-of-its-kind in Minnesota business-led initiative. The center, through collaboration with our local chambers and other key partnerships, will offer research and programs to sustain and grow Minnesota’s economy for the long term.

The center has four components:

* RealTime Talent brings together education, workforce, economic development and private-sector leaders to understand and address Minnesota’s talent shortage. It provides real-time labor market data to inform and affect market-oriented decisions to Minnesota businesses and education system.
* MN Job Match is a job-to-candidate platform that helps employers find the right fit in qualified candidates. This platform’s distinctive capabilities match modern skills with the changing needs in the marketplace, helps bridge the gap among job-seekers and employers, and identifies new opportunities.
* Business Education Networks seek to narrow the skills gap by helping students understand the career opportunities and complete necessary degree and certificate programs, thus helping employers find highly-skilled workers. The network is already connecting businesses and local chambers with students, educators and workforce training programs in Winona, Brainerd, Waconia and White Bear Lake, with plans to accelerate networks throughout the state.
* Educational opportunities bring together community and business leaders facing these challenges and offering solutions to ensure long-term economic success. The center offers resources and information that can expand employers’ knowledge base and offer new, innovative approaches to recruitment and retention.

To be certain, the Minnesota Chamber and our local partners are not alone in addressing the workforce shortage. The Center for Workforce Shortage will seek to combine public policy and the private sector to tackle the talent deficit. New collaborations are necessary to supply employers with qualified employees. We will pro-actively bring together and engage organizations and thought-leaders to mobilize our state’s employers – the players with the most at stake in ensuring Minnesota’s workforce is well prepared.

Doug Loon is president of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce – [www.mnchamber.com](http://www.mnchamber.com).