

Furniture makers look for labor solution

BY GUY LUCAS
ENTERPRISE EDITOR

HIGH POINT — When Danny Keck says Tomlinson Cos. has tried everything to try to fill its furniture manufacturing jobs, he means everything — flexible work hours, 100% paid health coverage, wellness days, employee appreciation events, retention bonuses, referral bonuses and inviting work spaces, to name the major ones.

“Everything but having someone outside and twirling a sign,” he said. “I’ve thought about that.”

Keck’s stories about trying to find furniture workers had

many echoes Tuesday at the second informational session organized by Guilford Works, Business High Point-Chamber of Commerce, the city of High Point and Guilford Technical Community College.

As at the first session in November, those attending agreed on the problems — including outdated perceptions of furniture factory work, the work environment and the pay, but also record low unemployment rates that have industries competing for a small pool of workers.

It’s particularly hard for companies that don’t have resources to widely advertise openings, said Kiersten Ketcham of

Furnitureland South.

“Small employers have trouble getting exposure,” she said. “It’s hard for us to get ... any type of job in front of anybody.”

There was broad agreement that the industry needs help getting information into schools, particularly in middle school and early high school grades, and making those connections.

Joyce Ryce of GuilfordWorks said that future discussions would include beginning work on the kinds of messaging that could convey the industry’s higher pay and benefits, advanced technology and other factors that could attract more workers.



LAURA GREENE | HPE
Sarah Stevenson, middle, economic development manager for the High Point EDC, leads a breakout group in a discussion at Tuesday’s furniture industry information session hosted by GuilfordWorks at Conqdon Yards.