

Column: College Community Connection

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Customized, Job-Driven Training

By Dr. Al Roberts

Businesses across the Commonwealth of Virginia, including right here in the Southside region, continue to report a skills mismatch between job seekers and open positions. Skilled workers, especially in information technology and advanced manufacturing, seem to be in short supply. Entrepreneurs often testify to the fact that nurturing a business is a challenging proposition, but when companies cannot find workers with the skills necessary to fill critical positions, business success can be even harder to achieve.

At the same time, escalating college costs sometimes put higher education out of reach. Many young people and transitioning workers are looking for ways to prepare for well-paying careers without amassing heavy burdens of debt.

The solution for growing businesses and the answer for the potential future workforce may be the same: apprenticeship programs. Apprenticeship is more than just assisting in a workplace, more than just on-the-job training. Registered apprenticeship programs provide a formal plan that combines at-work elements with rigorous classroom preparation and mentoring. They culminate in a certification that the graduate is fully prepared, experienced, and job-ready.

Traditionally, U.S. apprenticeships have focused on skilled trades, but recent innovations and policy changes are bringing the model to other industries. Penny Pritzker, former U.S. Secretary of Commerce explains that “by building regional partnerships with education, workforce, and social service institutions, businesses and government can create training programs that connect workers with middle class careers.” For diverse companies, she notes that “developing talent through apprenticeships results in a more dedicated, flexible, loyal workforce that is poised to rise into leadership positions and make the companies more competitive.”

Southside Virginia Community College is proud to be able to bring these benefits to the communities of south-central Virginia. Through ApprenticeVA, a collaborative effort among four community college partners, we can help businesses leverage the resources needed to create registered apprenticeship programs and customize them to meet specific training requirements.

Rob Deutsch, Director of Human Resources at Global Safety Textile acknowledges, “In today’s current economy, hiring qualified maintenance mechanics is a challenge.” His company is one among several with whom SVCC has worked to establish registered apprenticeship programs. Others include Beach Mold and Tool, Toll Brothers, Huber Woodproducts, Presto Products, and Microsoft.

At SVCC, more than 40 apprentices are currently registered and working on the job and in the classroom. They will graduate with industry-recognized credentials in fields such as industrial maintenance and network technician.

Apprenticeship programs have a proven track record and are well situated to meet 21<sup>st</sup> century needs. If your business would like more information about how it can benefit from a registered apprenticeship program, contact SVCC's Apprenticeship Coordinator, Kelly Arnold at [Kelly.arnold@southside.edu](mailto:Kelly.arnold@southside.edu) or call 434-579-7260.

Dr. Al Roberts is president of Southside Virginia Community College, an institution of higher learning that provides a wide variety of education opportunities to a diverse student population within a service area that spans ten counties and the city of Emporia. He can be reached via email at [al.roberts@southside.edu](mailto:al.roberts@southside.edu).