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BCC lands Back-to-Work grant geared at putting people back to work

By Rachel Johnson, Staff Writer
Wednesday, September 5, 2012 at 3:02 pm

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SUPPLY—There is a common goal at Brunswick Community College—to help put people back to work.



Rachel Johnson

Velva Jenkins, associate vice president for economic and workforce development, and Susanne Adams, president of Brunswick Community College, are making strides to bring education to the people of Brunswick County. A new grant targets out-of-work people in the community and helps prepare them for a new career at little to no cost.

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Brunswick Community College recently learned it was selected as one of 16 community colleges in the state to receive funding under the Back-to-Work grant. BCC is the only one in the southeastern portion of the state.

The program is a partnership between North Carolina community colleges and the North Carolina Department of Commerce.

When Velva Jenkins, associate vice president for economic and workforce development, first heard of the grant in early August, she and a team went to work to secure a portion of funding for BCC.

"This is great for the county," said Susanne Adams, BCC president.

The Back-to-Work program is a training program designed to prepare North Carolinians experiencing long-term unemployment by offering job training and retraining in technical education areas,

employability skills and third-party industry recognized credentials.

The program includes \$7 million. BCC was awarded \$269,000 to be used by June 30, 2013.

To qualify for the grant, BCC had to prove it could train students and also had to show local businesses support it.

The grant will enable BCC to offer courses to students who have been unemployed long-term, who have exhausted their unemployment or have finished 26 weeks of unemployment.

"We have identified 2,000 people in Brunswick County," Adams said.

"This is to help the unemployed of Brunswick County," Jenkins added.

This grant doesn't target a specific age range. As long as an individual meets unemployment criteria, the person is qualified.

"Our target group is big. Students can come back and upgrade their skills for free," Jenkins said. "How can we ask someone who has been unemployed 36 months to pay?"

Through the grant, students' tuition and registration fees will be covered at no charge to the individual. Adams and Jenkins are unsure how many students the grant will cover as each student's needs will vary.

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"It is hard to determine because it could be \$500 to \$200 per student," Jenkins said. "The goal is to serve as many of the 2,000 as we can reach. If they come to us, we will try to help."

"The goal is to get them fast back to employment," Adams said.

The training plans focus on manufacturing, construction trades, information technology, transport technology, agriculture/natural resources and business technology.

Additionally, the program includes professional development for instructors.

"This is a long-term benefit to BCC," Adams said.

BCC is also in the process of hiring a career counselor. Adams explained this is a position the school wanted to fill but was without funding. The position will be funded for one year through the grant.

"The opportunity to have a career counselor available is a big help," Jenkins said. "They will be available for those who need professional guidance to help develop a career path."

"We are able to implement this position without a cost to the college," Adams said. "We are also hiring a project director and a recruiter. This has created three positions for one year right away. We want to put people back to work."

Students will be prepared for employment in six months or less. Skill sets will include communication skills, soft skills, work ethic, basic job skill information and the capacity to obtain state and national certification. The program is through continuing education and has open enrollment. At the end of the courses, area businesses have agreed to offer internships and to help make sure students get in front of a job opportunity.

"The employer will know the individual has the basic skill set in place," Jenkins said. "They will know the safety rules and be proficient in the skill. They will be employable."

Students must be a North Carolina resident and may reside in any county. The main focus for BCC will be on Brunswick County, but all are welcome to apply. BCC anticipates the program will help others in New Hanover, Columbus and surrounding counties. Childcare and travel expense will not be covered for students.

Call 755-7378 for more information on the Back-to-Work grant.

Rachel Johnson is a staff writer at The Brunswick Beacon. Reach her at 754-6890 or rjohnson@brunswickbeacon.com.



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