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Moses Lake Industries Uses JSP Training Grants to help Employees Gain Skills

"It's amazing," says Anna Hirz, Training and Development Coordinator at Moses Lake Industries. "Our employees are getting training" in order to increase their skills. The training is made possible for Moses Lake Industries because of a Job Skills Program (JSP) grant through the State of Washington.

success in the workplace and financial success within the industry." The grants "upskill" current workers who can be promoted within the company and who then need to be replaced with entry-level employees, thus reducing unemployment in the community, Laszlo says.

State-wide, the JSP grants have covered hundreds of training topics since 2009. The legislature authorizes \$5.2 million in funding on a two-year basis, according to Laszlo. Companies wishing to take advantage of the grants have to apply in partnership with BBCC with and have to show the training will have an economic impact for the employer, the region, and for the state as a whole. With the JSP grant, the employer is required to match the grant by paying wages and benefits for the workers who attend the training. Grants range from \$50,000 to \$150,000, depending on the training needs of the employer.

Laszlo says the way to get started is to "call me" at the Center for Business and Industry Services. "We want to be a resource," she adds. Applications for next year's funding have to be complete by mid-May to make the first round of reviews on June 1st, Laszlo explains.

One of the benefits of partnering with BBCC, Laszlo explains, is that they "work with the employer from training strategy development to finding instructors to final execution." She shows off a big white binder that's her "network of experts" from all over the state.

The Center for Business and Industry Services (CBIS) at Big Bend is a department that the college put together to reach out to local industries, Laszlo explains. "Partnering with employers to provide the resources to face the continued challenges and workforce needs" of local business and industry, a brochure

states.

The Job Skills Program is expanding, Laszlo points out. In the 2014-2015 grant period for the local service area, 265 employees were trained using JSP grants totaling \$200,000. But for the 2015-2016 period, it is projected that 1,500 employees will be trained with more than \$575,000 in grant awards.

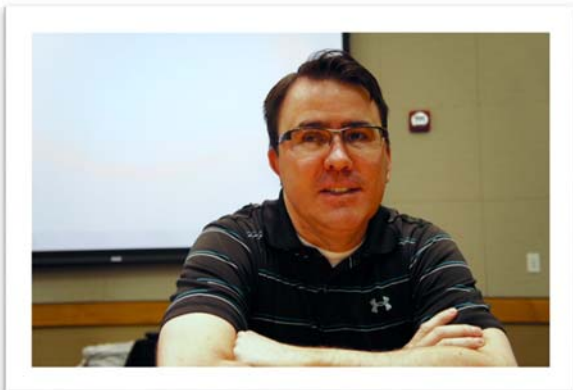


Beth Laszlo, Coordinator for the Center for Business and Industry Services at Big Bend Community College, says the JSP workforce training grants are a "proactive measure by the state." Laszlo explains that "workforce training increases the skills of current workers and it impacts our local economy by increasing the wages of those employees with new, promotable skills." And she adds "that increases retention, leading to



Ray Towry Loves His Work and Grant County

"I find it hard to imagine you could find a more welcoming area," says Ray Towry, Recreation, Tourism, and Public Relations Director for the City of Ephrata. Towry knows Grant County well, having grown up in Ephrata and lived in the county all his life except when he went to college. "I love the sense of community, the open space, and geology," Towry says of the county.



After graduating from Ephrata High School, Towry spent a short time trying to have a soccer career at Bellevue College. When that didn't work out, he transferred to Washington State University to become a physical education teacher and high school sports coach. But WSU ended its physical education program shortly after he arrived. While he was told he could finish his degree, he thought "what kind of education would you get from a dying program?" So Towry changed majors to Recreation Administration and Leisure Studies with an emphasis on business.

After college, Towry started working for the City of Moses Lake. "Then I got a call from the City of Ephrata to come home," he says. He's worked for the city for twelve years now. He also earned a Master of Public Administration from the Evans School of Public Policy and Governance at the University of

Washington while working. It was an "intense" program of 18 months, Towry explained, adding he was fortunate to be selected with "some of the brightest minds in the region."

"I really enjoy my work," Towry says. "I look forward to work. I have a great job and I work with great people and a great boss." He adds that Wes Crago, the city administrator, is "an amazing mentor and has taken the time to help me understand the role of local government." Crago emphasizes partnerships between communities, Towry explains. "Everyone playing nice in the sandbox," he says.

Towry feels "blessed" by the stability of the city council and mayors. "They all recognize the role of government to serve the community" and work with the community to obtain goals. Towry says he "loves the people I work with," adding it's a "familial" atmosphere and a team effort.

The challenges Towry faces in his job are providing services on a budget that has been reduced by 30% with manpower that has been reduced by 20%. But, he says, the team atmosphere has brought everyone together to figure out how to do it. Towry would like to better explain to the public the role recreation plays in a community and how it can be an economic driver. Recreation, he says, "is a piece of the puzzle" that helps a community grow.

Towry became a director of the Grant County Economic Development Council in 2012 as part of his job duties for public relations. "The city as a whole recognizes a lot the EDC does for the region and what's good for the region is good for the

city." Towry says the Ephrata city council and mayor understand the importance of what the EDC does for Grant County. And, Towry adds, "if you want to support the EDC, you have to be involved."

"If you look at the growth the county has experienced the past decade, it's self-evident" that the EDC is doing a lot of things right, Towry says. He points to the diversity "gained in the economy." Towry explains that a lot of what the EDC does daily is "shrouded in secrecy" because of non-disclosure agreements. So a lot of people don't understand how busy the EDC is, Towry adds, and that "Grant County is a big player in the region for economic development." Grant County is "experiencing things other areas of the region haven't and it's due to the hard work and leadership of a lot of people," Towry says. He adds that the various councils and commissions in the county made decisions that "place Grant County in a great position." "We can't go out and advertise all the communications and interest we have but there's a lot of it," Towry adds. Towry was Vice-President of the EDC last year, and is President this year.

"We're on a good, solid path going forward," Towry says. He'd like to see more growth in regional networks as communities plan together and move forward. "As we continue to shrink globally, that's where we have to go," he explains.

The biggest change Towry says he's seen living in Grant County is the diversification of the economy from just agriculture to agriculture and processing and industry. Also Towry has seen the growth in population of Grant County and the growth of Big Bend Community College and the classes that BBCC has



MLI Uses Training Grants Cont.

The Center for Business and Industry Services works with the Grant County Economic Development Council to find grants for new businesses coming to the county. New employee training, especially for newly located employers or to support expanding industry lines is also a part of the Job Skills Program, Laszlo explains. SGL and TAKATA have both used a JSP grant to train their new employees, she adds.

"It's a trickle-down effect," Laszlo says. The program creates better-skilled employees which helps their employer be more successful which helps reduce unemployment.

For 2015-2016, Moses Lake Industries plans to train nearly 150 employees in 37 different skills or programs, ranging from basic chemistry to leadership programs. Some of the training topics are Electrical Energy Basics, Human Resources Ethics, Leadership Skills, and Success for Team Leads. Hirz says instructors come from Big

Bend or Gonzaga, and some are in-house. "We try to use local instructors as much as possible," she says.

"We're able to do training we might not be able to do," Hirz says of the program because the state pays all of the training costs. Laszlo adds that companies match those dollars with employee wages and benefits to attend the training. Hirz says Moses Lake Industries will hire people who have few skills and may be on their first job. So this

training is essential. Otherwise, Hirz says, training would be minimized and their employees probably wouldn't get the chance for advances or improvements in their company. Hirz explains that using the JSP grants makes Moses Lake

Industries more prosperous and therefore able to give back to the community more. Laszlo points out that Moses Lake Industries' normal employee turnover rate is 11%, but for the employees that have been through the JSP training, it's 2%, which is a huge cost savings.



"It's an excellent program," Hirz says, adding that Big Bend Community College is great to work with. "We've been very happy."

Ray Towry Cont.



made "to meet the needs of the region." "Someone in Moses Lake can get a bachelor's degree without leaving Moses Lake," he adds. Also, Towry cites the growth of tourism in the county that has "been amazing." He says people come here for the water and geological features, and hunting and fishing.

Towry is part of the Washington Recreation and Parks Association and the National Recreation and Parks Association. He has volunteered to coach youth sports. He was a member for 20 years of the Columbia Basin Officials Association and refereed high school basketball games.

"I'm not allowed to have fun," Towry says with a smile. As the father of four children ages 11 to 17, he and his wife, Shannon, "chase kids to all their events. Our fun is watching our children accomplish and grow."

But it comes back to the welcoming people of Grant County for Towry. "I'm blessed to have that since I got to Ephrata 12 years ago."



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