



**Economic
Development and
Growing the
Economy**



Profiles of Best Practices

WoodLINKS Program: Workforce Training for Youth

Community, County

Laona, Forest County

Area of Project Impact

Forest County

Population Affected

9,323

Situation

Despite abundant natural resources in northern Wisconsin, the expansion of the existing wood products industry is threatened. This traditional regional industry is jeopardized by the absence of an available, qualified workforce. Furthermore, despite the need for qualified workers, there are few industrial arts programs in schools.

Economic Development Strategies

Based on the overall need for workforce development, the Superintendent of the Laona School District spearheaded the creation of the WoodLINKS program at Laona High School in 2002-03 in order to train the youth of today to become the skilled workforce of tomorrow.

Implementation

The goal of the WoodLINKS program is to train students for careers in the secondary wood products industry through a high school certification program with linkages to local industry partners. The two-year certification program teaches manufacturing processes, operation of equipment, finishing techniques, hand tools, joinery, and CNC machinery with routers, safety, math, reading skills, problem solving, product development and process analysis. The assessment for certification requires knowledge, skills and safety understanding of the program curriculum.

Industry partners integrally support the program by providing guidance on curriculum relevancy and mentoring to students through tours, in-class presentations, mock employment interviews and work experience opportunities. In addition, industry partners donate materials and supplies, sponsor career information resources, provide seasonal employment, contribute money for program operation, and participate in award ceremonies for outstanding program students. Ultimately, the WoodLINKS program expands opportunities in wood industry jobs through workforce training to benefit partnering industries as well as area youth and the community at large.

Partners and Leadership

Several organizations are partnering for the WoodLINKS program, including the Laona School District, USDA's Rural Development division, UW-Extension, and local businesses such as Nicolet Hardwoods and Nicolet Dimensions. Additional industry partnerships are being forged and it is anticipated that many of the area wood product industries will be involved in the program.

Outcomes

The WoodLINKS program is still in its development phase, but it is expected that 20 to 30 students will participate in the program each year, while seven to ten area wood product businesses will provide programmatic support as industry partners. It is hoped that the Laona area and Forest County will benefit in the long-term by gaining a skilled workforce for the wood products industry.

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