

## Great Promise Partnership: Developing the next greatest generation

High school students could be 'next greatest generation'

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VALDOSTA — “This could be the next greatest generation,” Mike Beatty said of high school students of today.

Beatty is president and chief executive officer of Great Promise Partnership, Inc.

GPP works with high schools, governments, businesses and the local community to simultaneously bridge gaps in the workforce, curb dropout rates and provide students with economic opportunities.

Beatty said GPP was modeled after Southwire in Carrolton.

“As an industry, they (Southwire) realized they could not retain a workforce so they decided to think outside the box. They built an entire campus dedicated to this program,” said Andrea Schrujjer, Valdosta-Lowndes Development Authority executive director.



Derrek Vaughn | The Valdosta Daily Times Tequann Butler learns the fundamentals of GIS data and mapping in his role at the city utilities department.



Derrek Vaughn | The Valdosta Daily Times Tyirekk Harrell, Antoine Bennett, Al Thomas and Dexter Folsom sort collected recyclables at the public works department.

Southwire was growing as a company but having trouble filling positions. The company hired and invested in high school students.

The company now has 250-300 students working through its program.

Similarly with GPP, schools identify promising students who are likely to drop out of school due to financial and other considerations. Businesses and governments provide participating students with part-time employment, job training and mentorship.

“The majority of these kids might not graduate (otherwise),” Beatty said. “Schools also get funding, which is key.”



Through GPP, students learn financial literacy, how to set up a bank account, etc.

Businesses, in turn, acquire willing workers and increased productivity.

“These young people are 25-30 percent more productive than other adult workers,” Beatty said.

The program also exposes students to fields of employment new to them, Schrujjer said.

The VLDA, in turn, exposes newly arriving industries to the local workforce available through GPP.

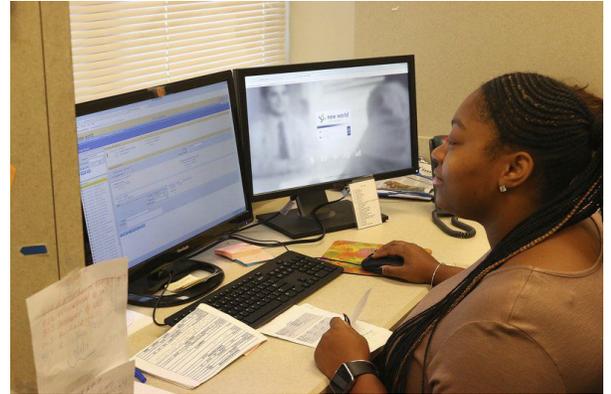
Derrek Vaughn | The Valdosta Daily TimesMark Miller serves a city resident with permitting information in the city's permit office.

“The development authority's role with the Great Promise Partnership is to serve as a liaison between the community and Great Promise Partnership, to make a connection between Great Promise Partnership and businesses that work with Great Promise Partnership,” Schrujjer said.

The City of Valdosta adopted the GPP program about six years ago.

In turn, the Georgia Municipal Association awarded Valdosta its trailblazer award for being an early adopter of GPP, Beatty said.

About 35 cities in Georgia have since adopted the program. Beatty hopes to expand GPP nationally.



Derrek Vaughn | The Valdosta Daily TimesMarshae Richards enters data for the meter reading division.



Derrek Vaughn | The Valdosta Daily TimesBrandon Mathis assists Valdosta Fire Department Fire Cpl. Matt Davis in making necessary repairs to the VFD Training Center.

Ofentimes, people simply don't know about what GPP does, Beatty said. He hopes to change that.

In Lowndes County, GPP currently partners with Fresh Beginnings, Wild Adventures Theme Park, City of Valdosta, eLead1 and the James H. Rainwater Conference Center.

Businesses and industries hoping to work with GPP can contact Executive Director Lori Heemann by phone at (404) 694-0328 or by e-mail: [lori@gppartnership.org](mailto:lori@gppartnership.org).