



Vermont HITEC: A Training Program That Guarantees Jobs

By MITCH WERTLIEB & MELODY BODETTE

(MONDAY, March 23, 2015) -- A new collaboration between Triad Design Service, Burlington College and a non-profit called Vermont HITEC will train students to become technical writers. It's the latest in a number of job-training programs offered by Vermont HITEC.

In the past the non-profit has trained people to become medical transcriptionists, phlebotomists, and to work in information technology and advanced manufacturing. Since the non-profit began 15 years ago, they've worked with over 1,000 students and 25 employers. Vermont HITEC's president, Gerry Ghazi, said the typical student ranges from someone just graduating high school to people who have earned a GED, to students in their sixties looking for a new career. Some are unemployed, others are underemployed.

"The hallmark of HITEC is guaranteed jobs," Ghazi said. "Any student who steps a foot into our class is guaranteed a job by one of our employer sponsors upon successful graduation. The programs are anywhere from eight to 10 weeks. They'll be guaranteed a job as an apprentice. As an apprentice, they get full benefits and their wages step up over the course of the apprenticeship." With some of the employer sponsors, students are paid during the training period.

The program relies on state and federal funding. Over the last 15 years, it has been awarded both federal competitive grants and congressional directed spending. "Senator [Patrick] Leahy has been key to our success over the years, funding us through congressional requests. And those requests turn around and guarantee jobs," Ghazi said. The non-profit is also funded through the state of Vermont and works closely with the Vermont Department of Labor and the Vermont Department of Economic Development.

Ghazi said there is cause for concern with the \$112 million budget gap facing Vermont lawmakers. "The key here is that we then have to turn down employers. Just as an example, Triad Design, they normally place those jobs in closest to the facilities where the business entities that they're serving. They got a huge contract with [a local company] which will allow

them to bring 120 jobs to Vermont over the next three years. Those 120 jobs, they could be placed where those facilities are located, but instead, we convinced them if they use our model, we will build that workforce here. And Triad said, 'Yes we will, if the incentives are available.'"

Vermont HITEC serves four industries: health care, information technology, business services and advance manufacturing. Ghazi said the program is in those four industries due to employer demand. "We worked with Dealer.com when they only had 60 employees, they were going to leave the state. They said, 'For two years we've been looking for individuals. We can't find them,'" Ghazi explained. They were able to make the connection and have had success working with Vermont HITEC. "Dealer.com took that huge leap of faith with us and we developed 14 account managers for them. From there, they said, 'We need seven more Java programmers.' We did Java programmers. Then they needed web developers. They bought into the model, and then their revenue started growing and they were able to afford their own growth." Ghazi said now the company is able to fund their own training program, perpetuating the same model going forward.

The company is going program by program. When they can't find federal funding, they go to the state. Currently Vermont HITEC has four programs running: They are training 20 certified medical assistants at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center (17 are Vermonters), 15 medical coders for Precyse, 12 technical writers for Triad, and 12 workers for Vermont Information Processing in Colchester. "We have to find funding for each one of those programs. Precyse is saying, 'We're ready to do another 30, we will not go and hire those in Alabama or the big cities, we will invest in Vermont if you can find that funding,'" Ghazi said. "So it's really crucial that the Legislature looks at the given pools of money being spent on workforce development and make it job driven so that we will pay X dollars for an education program and mentoring."