

Business & Industry Services Network Delivers Workforce Training to Connecticut Employers

When St. Francis Hospital and Medical Center needs customized and cost-effective training for its employees, it turns to the ***Business & Industry Services Network***. So do The Travelers and Pitney Bowes and BIC Corporation, just to name a few of the more than 300 employers state-wide who contract for one or several of approximately 100 training programs designed by the *Business & Industry Services Network*, a unit of the Community Colleges of Connecticut. The Network serves the training needs of thousands of organizations around Connecticut. Included in that number are workers in private companies, corporations, non-profit institutions, municipalities, and state departments.

The *Business & Industry Services Network* provides an essential link between business and education that David Watson of St. Francis Hospital has experienced for several years. As training coordinator for employee and management development, Watson arranged with Linda Guzzo, the Network director at *Capital Community College*, to set up classes in Spanish with a health-care focus for hospital employees. The result was a customized, 10-week program that enabled hospital employees to minimize the communication barrier with patients and visitors. Watson notes that the hospital would not have been able to offer this training "if it were not for the creativity and flexibility of the professional staff at the college who provided high quality and low cost adult education." Watson and Guzzo have collaborated on more than 10 courses for St. Francis Hospital employees and are now addressing similar needs for Mount Sinai Hospital.

Through the Network, the 12 Community Colleges play a vital role in supporting the state's economic development. A director at each college serves as liaison with employers in the college's service area to deliver tailor-made training and retraining programs that can be offered on-site or at a college. Employees usually receive a program certificate rather than college credit, although some companies sponsor credit courses.

With a shrinking pool of educated, skilled workers, companies often must address the problem of employees with deficiencies in basic math and reading skills that limit productivity on the job. One such company, Pitney Bowes, is successfully addressing these employee needs by offering courses arranged by *Norwalk Community College*. Since March 1990, approximately 1,000 employees have been trained in basic math skills and 450 employees in literacy -- basic reading, writing, speaking, listening and interpersonal skills, according to Steve Croncota, the college's Network director. Employees are immediately able to apply newly mastered skills to their daily work because the curriculum is designed to integrate the basics with the specific work of the company. These skills-enhancement programs are only two of six offered by Pitney-Bowes. The company estimates an eight percent increase in productivity as a result of this training.

Training costs for small businesses can be so prohibitive that they are sometimes forced to do without. But not so for the companies in rural northeastern Connecticut that typically range from 10 to 150 employees. For the past two and a half years the *Business & Services Industry Network* has organized several consortia, based on businesses with similar needs, to provide cost-effective training. In one year, Jill O'Hagan, the Network director at *Quinebaug Valley Community College*, in Danielson, negotiated 48 course contracts with 27 companies to train 714 employees. Companies often send as few as one employee or as many as nine. Training for production supervisors has been a common need, particularly regarding issues of quality, O'Hagan notes. Seminars allow supervisors to identify a quality problem (such as increased product defects), assess its cost to the company, work up a solution, and recommend action. Members of these consortia have often shared with O'Hagan what they see as a by-product of their participation: the opportunity to share common problems and solutions