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Immediate Release

Contact: Pete Tesch, President, Economic Development Council of St. Lucie County

Phone: (772) 336-6254 Email: ptesch@youredc.com

**Closing the Gap
Results of the Treasure Coast Skills Gap Study Presented to Council**



Connecting business and education communities through creative partnerships and collaborations, and introducing new modes of employee training and learning are the keys to broadening the talent pool and growing high-wage, high value jobs throughout the Treasure Coast. Those findings and the full results of the Treasure Coast Skills Gap study, including a strategic framework for implementation, were presented February 7th at the Economic Development Council of St. Lucie County (EDC) Investors' luncheon.

"Implementing the recommendations will move us quickly toward our goal, which is to build a thriving and highly sustainable workforce," said Richard Kolleda, of Spherion and chair of the EDC

Workforce Readiness and Education Taskforce. "As we expand our connections and create a continuous dialogue to identify talent gaps, we're not only preparing our graduates for the workforce, we're also sending a clear message to the business community, regionally and across the nation, that the Treasure Coast is open and ready for business, and actively developing a quality-workforce."

Talent is in demand: Respondents said they will need to fill nearly 2,000 jobs during the next 24 months.

Commissioned by the EDC and its partners, the skills gap study was launched in fall 2016 to identify talent gaps in the manufacturing, healthcare, and skilled trades sectors in Indian River, St. Lucie, Martin, and Okeechobee counties. Based on surveys, focus groups, interviews and programs in central Florida that have followed similar recommendations to build talent pipelines, results were presented by workforce-development expert Patricia K. Gehant, a principal in the St. Petersburg-based professional consulting firm that conducted the study.

"Building a common middle ground between business and educators," Gehant told a crowd of 125 investors, "will provide opportunities for innovative learning strategies that can accelerate the inclusion of new skills training to augment student learning. There are many ways to go about it, from integrating internal and external industry training materials into the classroom,

to focusing on certifications and skills development through workforce training institutes that can be rapidly deployed. However you create the framework, businesses will need to actively communicate their workforce needs, and plans should connect K-12, trades schools, and colleges to allow different points of delivery.”

The study recommends plentiful intersections for business and education to build common ground. Among them:

- Development of **industry-sponsored scholarships** to encourage students to enter training programs of high-demand fields
- **Summer externships** that encourage educators to experience different work environments and experiences to increase their knowledge of career options that can be shared with students
- **Tax incentives** for companies to provide resources to education through funding in-kind staffing support for classroom activities or materials for use in training industry-specific skills
- **Internships and apprenticeships** for high school and college students

“Additional options include things like Boot Camps to deliver rapid training to prepare students with critical-need workforce skills,” said Gehant. “Or starting in middle school, students can be introduced to industry careers through day trips. Industries and education can also initiate meet-ups to increase peer-supported learning specific to industry needs and skills. In the arts and tech world, meet-ups are a very common way to seek and develop talent.”

The study also highlights the significance of marketing, and defining the leadership roles for implementation.

“The EDC can use the outgrowths of the skills study in their national marketing campaign to attract new businesses to the area,” Gehant said. “Creating a marketing plan to introduce the advantages of careers in healthcare, manufacturing and the trades would be ideal.

“The strength of the region lies in the natural leadership resources already in place through the EDC and its diverse workforce committee and partnerships,” Gehant continued, “and the EDC was defined as the natural leader of the initiative.”

The next steps, explained EDC President Pete Tesch, will be to engage the community and set priorities.

“As a launching point, we’ll lead the efforts to build support for the Indian River State College Industrial Technology Center replacement initiative, and rally the community around supporting it,” said Tesch. “We’ll work closely with Keiser University, too. The programs and curriculums at both colleges are vital to filling the high-demand jobs in trades, manufacturing, and healthcare. Our first steps are to prioritize all recommendations and then work alongside all partners to coordinate the resources and leadership necessary for implementation.”



TREASURE COAST SKILLS GAP STUDY RESULTS FACT SHEET FEBRUARY 2017

Number of Surveys Completed – 110

Counties Surveyed - Indian River 18%, Martin 25%, Okeechobee 3%, St. Lucie 50%, and several surrounding counties 5%

Industries – Health Care, Manufacturing, and Trades (Other industries participated)

Industry Participation – Trades 38%, Manufacturing 20%, Health Care 15%, and Other 26%

Company Size – Under 50 employees = 74%; Companies 50-500 emp. = 20%; Companies over 500 emp. = 6%

New jobs that businesses will need to fill over the next 24 months:

- All Industries = 1,885 new jobs
- Health Care
 - 1,404 total positions to fill
 - 508 nursing, 188 Nurses’ Aides Orderlies and Attendants, and 131 Home health aides a position will need to be fill with new graduates and experienced workers.
 - 68% report difficulty filling positions
- Trades
 - 251 position to be filled with experienced and new graduates
 - 46 Construction labors, 35 electricians, 28 plumbers, and 23 carpenters will be needed
 - 94% report difficulty filling the positions
- Manufacturing
 - 230 new positions will need to be filled with experienced and journeyman
 - 57 assemblers, 28 machine operators/CNC Machine Operators, 27 mill operators, and 17 production leads
 - 62% reported difficulty filling these positions

View the [full report](http://www.youredc.com) on the EDC website www.youredc.com.

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The Economic Development Council of St. Lucie County, Inc. is a public/private 501(C) 6 corporation established to attract new business, support expansion and retention of existing businesses, and advance community and economic development in St. Lucie County. The goal of the EDC is to develop high-wage, high-skill jobs in our community.