

Southside Virginia Education Center

In 2000 the US Census Bureau reported only 62% of Greensville County residents age 25 and older have obtained a high school diploma, compared to 82% statewide. This low educational attainment was reflected in the County's low household median income of \$32,002, compared to the statewide median of \$46,677.

Public Forum

Two public forums were held by Greensville County to solicit comment on area workforce development issues. The forums were advertised in the Independent Messenger, a newspaper of general circulation in the area. Notices were also posted at the Greensville County Government Center, Social Services Office, Virginia Employment Commission, and the Richardson Memorial Library.

A total of 32 stakeholders attended the two forums. Several key concerns were discussed at both forums. The industry representatives identified the need for:

- Ongoing communications between educational providers and industries
- Applicants to have interview and presentation skills
- Measurement skills from 12-inch rulers to hydraulic gauges
- Workforce to have a higher level of education, at least a GED
- Basic job skills
- Basic life skills
- More career exploration opportunities
- Certification programs in fields such as electronics and hydraulics
- Programs to prepare an individual to pursue a certification program

Surveys

A survey was developed through the efforts of the staff of the Department of Housing and Community Development, local county staff, a representative of Southside Programs for Adult Continuing Education (SPACE) and a representative of the Virginia Workforce Center located in Emporia. The surveys were distributed through the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC), SPACE, and Southside Virginia Community College. VEC mailed over 200 copies to active claimants in the Greenville/Emporia area and those registered in the SPACE programs who were pursuing their high school diploma or GED through the Workforce Investment Program.

The participants were asked what they feel has made it difficult to find the job they want. The largest percentage of VEC respondents, 38%, stated they need more education, 26% felt they lacked the skills necessary. The SVCC responses were higher, 65% and 27% respectively. When asked of both participating groups if a job-training facility were located in Greenville County, would they be interested in taking classes 91% replied "yes".

Perdue Rapid Response Survey

An additional survey was taken of Perdue Deboning Factory employees after the announcement of its closing. Of the 479 respondents 32% did not have a high school diploma or GED. Additional education and training was requested by 64% of the participants. Several job search and skill assessments were also requested. These included resume writing by 26% of the respondents, career planning by 22% of the respondents, interview techniques by 17%, and skill/interest testing requested by 13%.

At that time the Workforce Investment Agency was assisting 28 people per year in obtaining their GED. That was the maximum the Agency could accommodate due to space

limitations. With the closing of Perdue 75 employees requested classes to pursue their GED.

Management Team

A management team was formed to review the unfavorable demographics, public forum discussions, the VEC/SVCC survey results, and the current workforce training programs. The management team consisted of representatives from the local industries, existing educators, workforce program providers, local government, unemployed, underemployed, and the VEC.

The management team recognized the following problems:

- The lack of facility space sufficient to provide basic to technical education
- The lack of training opportunity for industries to improve the work skills of existing employees.
- An inability for public schools, industry, educational providers and even the unemployed and underemployed to assess the capabilities of individuals for career planning and job placement.
- Lack of educational or training opportunities which address basic life skills.
- A need to expand communication among providers of education, industry, underemployed and unemployed.

Solution

With poverty being the lead factor which affects educational performance and attainment of the community, greater accessibility to educational programs benefits the entire community as education improves the opportunity of employment or promotion.

The management group decided to construct a place - The Southside Virginia Education Center – in which to conduct a workforce development program. Utilizing outside sources the group desired to develop and implement a program which would unify locally existing efforts such as courses offered by SVCC and initiate use of recognized programs such as Work Keys.

The Southside Virginia Education Center located in Greensville County, opened its doors in August 2008 with the first 18,000 square foot phase. Since that time enrollment in workforce training education has more than tripled. In addition to classrooms and office space for Southside Community College, the first phase of the facility houses a resource center for public use, a large computer classroom, a health science lab, two distance learning classrooms, an industrial training lab, a conference room, bookstore, and student lounge. All classrooms are equipped with SmartBoards, projectors, VCR/DVD combos and instructor computer and printers to enhance the learning process.

Greensville County completed construction of Phase II of SVEC in March 2010. The Golden Leaf Commons is a 9,000 square foot open conference center designed to enhance the workforce training abilities. The room is used for a variety of functions including business and industry events as well as civic and individual ceremonies. Training sessions have been held at the Golden Leaf Commons by the Department of Housing and Community Development, the US Army, The Virginia Department of Health, as well as private local and regional businesses and industries.

SVEC was conceived through the partnering of local industry and business, local government, SVCC and the workforce service providers including the Workforce Investment Board and the Southside Programs for Adult Continuing Education. Each

partner has a seat on the Board of Directors for the facility ensuring their voice in the development process. The Board meets monthly to continue developing the programs needed by current and future industry. Additional members to the Board have been appointed by Longwood University and the local K-12 school board. These appointments will continue to bridge the gap between high school programs and workforce training programs at SVEC.

The public focus on educational attainment and the construction of the Southside Virginia Education Center has already had a positive effect on the population. The 2010 Census shows a 7% rise in the number of residents 25 years or older who have obtained a high school degree or equivalent.

In the last two years SVEC has coordinated with staff from Mary Baldwin College and Longwood University to bring four year degree programs to the site. Currently students can receive a degree in elementary education, business for a sustainable future, marketing, health care administration, criminal justice. Additional programs such as social work and nursing are anticipated with the construction of the third phase of SVEC.

Continuing to Grow

Phase III, scheduled to open in fall of 2013, will be a 21,900 square foot addition that will include 5 classrooms, 4,000 square feet of Virginia Employment Commission office space, and a large technology based instruction lab. The lab will include vital technical education courses. Southside Virginia Community College will implement programs in electronic technology, high performance manufacturing, technical studies and industrial service technology in Phase III. The Board of Directors designed phase III with the goal of better educating our citizens for advanced technology based jobs.

SVEC was constructed with funding from the Virginia Tobacco Commission, The Department of Housing and Community Development, United States Department of Agriculture, and other local and federal grant funds. Annual operational costs are supported by Greensville County and the City of Emporia.