

Overview of initiatives to address work force shortage

Work force shortage — it's an issue that's been mentioned repeatedly in this column, not only as a Sheridan-specific problem, but as a crisis in most Western states.

Sheridan County residents are proud of our low unemployment rate (less than 3 percent); however, we still have many jobs in our area that remain unfilled.

We keep hearing and reading national news that, in many other states, this is just the beginning — baby boomers are starting to retire and are leaving the work force, leaving highly skilled positions vacant.

Subsequent generations are smaller, so there will not be as many workers to fill those positions. Younger workers may not yet possess the experience or specialized training required for highly skilled jobs.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, there will be 10 million more jobs than workers in the United States by 2010.

There is no doubt that our national economy is transitioning; changes will impact Sheridan and, as a community, we need to be prepared for the future.

Through Forward Sheridan's recent strategic planning process, the Sheridan community identified not only a general work force shortage as one of the top 10 challenges to economic development, but also careers for young professionals as

another one of the top 10 challenges.

Both challenges are addressed with specific goals and initiatives in the Economic Development Strategic Plan for Sheridan County (the full plan is available on our Web site — www.forwardsheridan.com).

Over the next four weeks, we will be presenting each initiative in detail. Several task forces are working to address this multifaceted challenge; recruiting workers requires targeted efforts to be effective.

One subcommittee of the Workforce Recruitment Task Force is creating strategies to re-engage older workers back into the work force — by encouraging companies to hire older workers and encouraging older workers to re-enter the work force, re-engaging older workers can help alleviate the work force shortage.

Another subcommittee of the Workforce Recruitment Task Force is creating strategies to transition military service people into the civilian work force — targeting recruitment efforts to military bases could bring highly skilled workers to

A Community Affair

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Planning for Sheridan's economic development



Sheridan companies.

The Career and Technical Education Task Force, comprised of industry representatives and high school teachers in School Districts 1 and 2, is exploring options to provide technical training at the high school level to prepare students who are not college-bound for gainful employment upon graduation.

hYPE (helping Young Professionals engage) is creating a vibrant social network for young workers, helping to retain the young work force already in Sheridan; hYPE will also be working within alumni networks and social networking Web sites to find new ways to recruit young workers to Sheridan.

Not only are these task forces creating innovative strategies to address Sheridan's work force shortage, but by addressing other challenges to economic development, Sheridan is becoming a more attractive destination for workers.

When there are more jobs than workers, a job is no longer the reason for the location — workers look for the community

first, and then find a job.

By proactively addressing our challenges, Sheridan becomes a more attractive community — creating a comprehensive design plan for our city and county, building a state-of-the-art child-care center, facilitating communications between city and county government, ensuring that there is enough work force housing, working with employers to implement drug policies and drug-testing programs, recruiting additional airline services and ensuring better service from current airlines serving Sheridan are all ways to make Sheridan a more attractive community.

Add to this Sheridan's existing strengths — a strong arts community, a picturesque location near the Big Horn Mountains, a vibrant and historic downtown, a state-of-the-art health care network and educational system, and a strong entrepreneurial spirit — Sheridan is a wonderful place to live, work, and play.

By celebrating our community assets and targeting recruitment efforts, Sheridan is a destination for skilled workers.

"A Community Affair" is a weekly column from citizens who support Forward Sheridan, a professional business organization of invested partners whose purpose is to develop and maintain a sound economy in Sheridan County. Philippe Chino is president/CEO of Forward Sheridan.