

Eastern Washington Partnership

WorkSource System Update

February 2017

WWCC Pursues Enhanced Adult Education Grant Funding

Walla Walla Community College leaders are actively pursuing grant funds to sustain and enhance adult basic education services in direct alignment with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. This year's ***Basic Education for Adults, Integrated English Language / Civics grant*** opportunity is an open competitive application coordinated through the State Board for Community & Technical Colleges.

Eligible training providers must offer programs that support students from program entry to successful transition into college level education and the workplace. Funding for Integrated English Language Civics requires an ESL framework that incorporates contextualized instruction, technology and a comprehensive college and career readiness pathway. Navigation and Support Services are an essential requirement to foster student success.

Current WWCC offerings that would qualify include: English language acquisition, High School completion, GED, High School 21+, workplace programs, and all Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-Best) programs such as, Nursing, Watershed Ecology, and Early Childhood Education.

Although funding levels for the grant are relatively modest at approximately \$125,000 annually, the resources afford eligible students to benefit from greatly reduced tuition costs while participating in approved training pathways.

The grant application is due on March 2, 2017, and preliminarily approved applications will be announced on March 29th. Colleges chosen to receive funding will receive final grant approval on June 4th.

Northern Counties to Feel Impacts of Business Closures

Kinross Mine and Mill Operations

The previously announced closure of the Echo Bay Minerals / Kinross Mine and milling operations recently gained momentum with the submission of a formal WARN notice on February 10th. The WARN confirmed that the Buckhorn mine will cease operations in March of this year, with large scale employee layoffs to follow in April.

Concerns surrounding the anticipated closure of the mine and milling operations had triggered the submittal of a petition for Trade Adjustment Assistance services in 2015, with the Department of Labor subsequently certifying the company in November of that year. Small numbers of workers were separated from the company during the latter part of 2016; however the formal closure date was extended on several occasions. The company now plans to separate up to 95 mine employees by April 21st, although a few employees will be retained temporarily to assist with decommissioning.

Company officials will subsequently notify employees of the Mill operation regarding details of the closure timelines starting in the first week of March. Total counts of impacted Mill employees are not yet available; however the number is expected to be similar to that of the mine based on previously supplied data.

Employment Security staff from the Colville and Omak offices will be facilitating on site presentations regarding unemployment insurance claims filing, and WorkSource / TAA services at the mine facility on February 28th, and March 1st. Subsequent workshops and on site services will be hosted in Republic to support workers in accessing needed reemployment and TAA services.

Hearth & Home Technologies

On February 7th, Hearth and Home Technologies announced its decision to permanently close its plant in Colville. The formal announcement included submittal of a WARN notice, and ended several weeks of speculation about the company's plans resulting from an earlier announcement of a 30 day "capacity analysis." News of the decision also affirmed the company's plans to shift all production to its facility in Halifax Pennsylvania, resulting in job losses for approximately 90 current employees. A small number of employees engaged in product engineering and technical services will remain in Colville.

Timelines for the closure specify that employee layoffs will begin in mid-May of this year, with the final closure of the facility targeted for August. Initial Rapid Response communications are underway with company officials, and plans are forming for employee needs surveying, and on-site orientations that would occur in late April. Based on identified needs of the workforce, multiple WorkSource partner entities and community organizations will be engaged to participate in the worker orientations and subsequent on-site activities.

New Unemployment Benefit System Launches in January

The anticipated launch of the new **Unemployment Tax and Benefit (UTAB)** system occurred as planned on January 3rd. Implementation of the system culminated more than 18 months of system design and development work, and replaced an aging system that was more than 20 years old. UTAB offers significant enhancements for customers to access information about their accounts, and improves communication options with the department. Enhancements provided include:

Employer e-Services:

- Online capability to respond to communications about employee quits and discharges
- Ability to sign up for the Shared Work program and manage employees who are currently enrolled in the program

Claimant e-Services:

- Apply for benefits / submit weekly claims
- Obtain information about benefits (benefit amounts, status of payments, etc.)
- Ability to read and respond to communications & fact finding inquiries

As anticipated, customers seeking assistance in navigating the system has increased foot traffic at WorkSource locations around the state. Secure Access Washington (SAW) account creation issues continue to pose the greatest challenges due to rigorous identity verification processes that are required when establishing an account. Unemployment Insurance Claims Centers have increased work hours, and offered additional communication options to address high claims volumes and to assist with troubleshooting of customer claim issues.