

Logistically Speaking

Multiple Efforts in Place to Grow the Workforce

By Matt L. Ottinger

While Indiana's unemployment rate can be categorized as anywhere from the official 9% rate to a much higher number when counting those who have abandoned the job search, many employers remain frustrated that they can't fill existing openings due to the lack of a skilled workforce. Education institutions and businesses are now working diligently to remedy Indiana's dearth of talent to fill existing jobs. That process begins with education and training, with one of the focus areas in the field of logistics.

Not just 'Plain' old logistics

A major development is the new Logistics Training and Education Center, which opened in Plainfield in late January. A project of Vincennes University, the center educates students on order picking, forklift certification, truck driver training and includes short-term classes in Six Sigma and quality management.

"Several years ago, the university recognized that logistics was a growing field and there was a need for an associate's degree in logistics," relays David Tucker, Vincennes University vice president of workforce development. "Five or six years ago, we started offering a supply chain logistics management degree on the Vincennes campus. It's basically designed for someone who wants to be a logistics professional – primarily your first-line supervisor job."

He explains that after searching for a location that could complement that training, Plainfield became an obvious choice. There is more than 25 million square feet of warehouse and distribution space within the town itself. Plainfield also agreed to reimburse the school \$100,000 per year for the first five years of operation.

"Without that (financial support), we probably would've rented 8,000 to 10,000 square feet, but because we got a commitment from them, we rented 25,000 square feet," Tucker explains. "It helped us fully launch our program instead of building it piece by piece."

Mark Sell, president and co-founder of MD Logistics in Plainfield, believes the facility will serve businesses in the area well by producing properly trained workers.

"With this Vincennes center, it can be a great feeder for us to recruit talent in our warehouses, and that could be an incredible advantage for us," he contends. "The time we spend bringing in people from off the street and into the business, to be self-sufficient and have a basic understanding and knowledge of a warehouse layout and the workflow – it can take us four to six months to get someone up to speed. If we can get someone to that point through the education process and we wouldn't have to spend that time, it's better for the employee as their opportunities are greater, and we're better off as a business."

Sell also believes the Plainfield center will be a place he can send current workers for further training, instead of using in-house resources. He says the center could be another tool to make Central Indiana more attractive to businesses and bring more jobs to the area.

Seeking excellence

Another effort comes from The Excel Center charter school, operated by Goodwill Industries of Central Indiana. Launched in August 2010, there are currently three centers operating in Indianapolis (two locations) and Decatur. Another is set to open in Anderson and a fifth will launch in 2013. The school offers a logistics readiness certificate, as well as other advanced certifications.

MSSC Now a Resource for Indiana Workers

The Indiana Chamber's Ready Indiana program partnered with the Manufacturing Skill Standards Council (MSSC) in late 2011 to help companies provide logistics training to their workers.

MSSC is a training and certification system focused on building the core skills needed by front-line production and material handling workers. The MSSC system, based upon national industry standards, offers employees (both current and new hires) the opportunity to verify that they have the skills needed for technology-intensive jobs.

The offerings include a Certified Logistics Associate certificate, which can lead to the mid-level Certified Logistics Technician certification.

Kris Deckard, Ready Indiana executive director, adds that, "In December, MSSC received ANSI-ISO accreditation, signifying that its training addresses a global standard for core competencies for both logistics and manufacturing employees."

For more information, visit www.readyindiana.org/mssc.

“With the economic turn, we saw people with doctorates start taking jobs from people with masters’ degrees, people with masters taking jobs from four-year degrees and on down,” explains Betsy Delgado, The Excel Center director. “And then anybody without a high school diploma could not get a job. In a good economy, in automotive and manufacturing, that wasn’t the case.”

Delgado says that with close to one million high school dropouts in Indiana, the school strives to offer some of them not just a diploma, but a career pathway.

“We figured out that if a student drops out of school, it costs society \$260,000 in social services, etc.,” she asserts. “If we can go into a community and graduate at least 100 students, it’s a reversal; instead they start contributing to the tax base and to society. The most personal thing for me is providing education to a parent – and most of our students are parents. If a parent graduates or gets a certification, there’s a strong likelihood the child will as well.”

She adds that students’ ages range from 16 to 73 years, with an average of about 24.

“We have some people who worked up in Anderson in car manufacturing,” Delgado notes. “They never got their diploma, but they were 45 to 50 years old and making \$60,000 to \$70,000 a year, and now they have to be retrained.”

At the Decatur site, the school offers logistics-related courses, including physical sciences.

“We hired Ivy Tech to teach our logistics readiness class,” she offers. “We worked with them very closely to make sure our curriculum is approved by them. We also do a project management (course) that we hire out through Ivy Tech.”

She adds that in math, questions are focused on manufacturing (relating to numbers of pallets and weight, how much space one needs to store them and how they can be transported). Additionally, the English courses are geared toward researching around those careers.

“We try to implement building toward the logistics industry within all of our curricula,” she explains.

Curriculum takes flight

The passenger terminal at the Indianapolis International Airport that opened in late 2008 also paved the way for new opportunities, including the development of a city within a city, of sorts. Popular in Europe, the concept of an “Aerotropolis” refers to the construction of a hub city around the airport itself. In addition to commercial and residential developments, it will also feature an educational component. Ivy Tech Community College is currently remodeling a call center to develop a logistics-focused classroom facility, slated to open later this year.

“The planning has been in the works for several years,” explains Kaye Walter, chancellor of Ivy Tech’s Central Indiana region. “We actually had members of our team participate with the airport when they did the initial study of the Aerotropolis. We’ve been in parts of the discussion since the beginning.”

She says the school will offer its general education curriculum at the facility, allowing campuses in Avon, Shelbyville and surrounding areas to have access. The main focus is going



Vincennes University’s Logistics Training and Education Center in Plainfield opened in January. Business leaders believe the training and feeder system will enhance workforce skills.

to be business and logistics.

“We’re going to build a full-fledged logistics program there, along with business tools, which could be anything from accounting to IT,” Walter notes. “In the logistics world, all of that is extremely important. We’re also looking at the possibility of putting our truck driving program in that area as well.”

She anticipates the facility will open with about 500 students, and indications are it could grow very rapidly.

“Aerotropolis is a concept you see a lot overseas; it’s literally an airport city,” Walter explains. “When you get off the airplane, you arrive in a ready-made city. There are goods coming in and out; there’s a train system and everything is right there. It really helps build the whole area around the airport into a thriving city.”

She adds that Indianapolis’ location and amenities make it a prime location for such a project.

“The whole concept here in Indianapolis is being a logistics hub because we are where all the highways come together,” Walter asserts. “You not only provide a means for people to get



Ivy Tech is repurposing an old ATA building at the Indianapolis International Airport as a logistics training facility in the new Aerotropolis development.

around, but provide jobs for people there. Education plays an important role because you'll need a trained workforce, and as that city around the airport grows, you'll need more skilled workers. And it all means more high-wage jobs for people in Indianapolis."

Business buy-in

Vincennes' Tucker points out that all the

programs will do little good if one group isn't actively engaged.

"In order for a workforce development program to be successful, you have to have several components of participation," he says. "The first is business participation. They have to commit to letting people know what kind of skill sets and training they need to hold jobs in their companies. They need to work with institutions like high schools and higher ed, and then they have to hire those folks when they come out of our programs. We have plenty of businesses saying that they'll hire our students. We're now even offering Six Sigma logistics training, because businesses have said they'll send their workers to it."

Delgado agrees that business participation is critical to the success of programs such as these.

"With logistics, we work with FedEx – and Conexus Indiana has connected us to a lot of corporations," she shares. "We are relatively new, but we're currently working with a company that makes wind turbines. We get our students on field trips to these businesses pretty much on a biweekly basis, and (business representatives) also speak to our students."

Delgado adds that Goodwill has strong connections with WorkOne and EmployIndy to help with job placement for its students.

Conexus Indiana is not only assisting at schools like Goodwill, but it's developing a high school curriculum to help Indiana's students prepare for the logistics field.

"What's happening is a lot of high school kids are guided toward four-year degrees – not middle-level manufacturing and logistics jobs, which on average sometimes pay more," asserts David Holt, Conexus Indiana vice president of operations and business development. "We thought that we need to get to these kids early on to educate them on what happens in advanced manufacturing and logistics and what good jobs they are. Once we started talking to businesses, it became clear that we needed a feeder system to get these kids interested so they will pursue these careers. Secondly, we wanted them to have an understanding of what it is, and the process of how goods get to consumers."

Geared toward public (including charters) and private schools, the curriculum will include such topics as material handling and planning, different shipping and transportation modes, value-added services, importance of safety, history of logistics, basic math skills, computer skills and a global understanding of markets.

"The way we designed it is to fit into existing lessons so it wouldn't place a burden on the schools – so history of logistics would be incorporated into history, or material handling would be incorporated into math classes," Holt adds.

The initial goal is to pilot the curriculum in about 10 schools in the fall of 2012.



The Excel Center, operated by Goodwill Industries of Central Indiana, assists students of all ages with learning skills to develop a new career pathway.

INFORMATION LINK

Resources: Betsy Delgado, Goodwill Industries of Central Indiana, at www.goodwillindy.org

David Holt, Conexus Indiana, at www.conexusindiana.com

Mark Sell, MD Logistics, at www.mdlogistics.com

David Tucker, Vincennes University, at www.vinu.edu

Kaye Walter, Ivy Tech Community College, at www.ivytech.edu