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Region marks National Apprenticeship Week during November

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A bevy of events were on tap throughout the week of Nov. 13 through 19, 2023, as the region took its place in nationwide festivities celebrating this year's National Apprenticeship Week.

One prominent regional event was the Apprenticeship Roundtable held midweek on Nov. 15.

Hosted by Madison County Employment & Training and St. Clair County Intergovernmental Grants Department Workforce Development Group, this morning session brought together educators, businesses, workforce development entities, elected officials and members from the community to discuss the impact of apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships already in place and those that are soon coming.

Four panel sessions were hosted during the two-hour-plus morning roundtable session.

The first panelists were Eric "Duff" Wrobbel with Holly's House of Hope, City of Collinsville Human Resources Director Payton Drury, and Agency for Community Transit Director of Human Resources Debbie Barron. They talked with attendees about how the apprenticeships for those with special needs are working for their respective entities, some of the challenges and "pain points" that became learning moments along the way, and the continuance and expansion of their participation in the program

ahead.

Sitting on the panel for the second topical area were Gateway Apprenticeship Hub Program Coordinator Becca Ryan and McKendree University Grant Administrative Coordinator Elizabeth Ketchum. Ryan and Ketchum provided an update on the Gateway hub program timeline.

In Summer 2022, the U.S. Department of Labor awarded Madison County and the St. Louis region workforce innovation areas an Apprenticeship Building America grant. This four-year, \$5.8 million grant funded the launch of the Gateway Apprenticeship Hub. The hub project aims to register at least 750 new apprentices across the region. It represents the first joint initiative between Illinois and Missouri workforce areas, with a goal of at least 70 percent participation among underserved and underrepresented communities.

"There are currently three focuses for the Hub," noted Ryan. "They are healthcare, bioscience and education."

"And we are happy to share that we have the first classroom teacher registered apprenticeship program in the state of Illinois," said Ketchum. This education apprenticeship program is in elementary education and is delivered online through McKendree University.

Ketchum further explained that it is a four-semester format as a paraprofessional pathway. Upon completion, a participant will have a bachelor's degree in elementary education and



Mac Medical Training Director John Barger is presented with a proclamation on Friday, Nov. 17 at Soulcial Kitchen in Swansea. The proclamation, signed by Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker to recognize Nov. 13 through 19, 2023, as National Apprenticeship Week in Illinois, was one of several presented at the celebratory event. Shown from the left are State Rep. Jay Hoffman; State of Illinois Apprenticeship Committee Chair Daniel Serota; Barger; State Rep. Katie Stuart and St. Clair County Intergovernmental Grants & Economic Development Departments Executive Director Rick Stubblefield. (Melissa Crockett Meske/Illinois Business Journal)

be qualified to teach grades 1 through 6. A special education endorsement is also available and McKendree has reduced its tuition for this pathway program.

Ketchum further noted that McKendree partners with school districts throughout the region, with five districts currently participating.

Ryan and Ketchum then shared next steps and further developments on tap for the Hub and its programs. Current Hub programs now include medical assisting, CNA, classroom and daycare teaching, certified dietary management and laboratory technician.

Current Gateway Apprenticeship Hub partners include BioSTL, BJC, UMSL, SIUE, SWIC, Lewis & Clark Community College, Collinsville Area Vocational Center (CAVC), McKendree University, Washington University MGI, Special School District of STL, MC Mental Health Board, YWCA of Metro St. Louis, and the area high schools.

Next up and in progress for the Hub are:

- Pre-apprenticeship opportunities, including SIUE alternative digital credentials for lab tech, SWIC and CAVC for CNA, and high school direct support professional pathways.
- Registered apprenticeship programs including SIUE laboratory technician, Stillwater Senior Living CNA, SWIC and Chestnut Health Sys-

January layoffs announced by U. S. Steel for Granite City mill; up to 1,000 affected

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On Nov. 28, 2023, U. S. Steel's announced that up to 1,000 employees are expected to be laid off at the Granite City Works steel mill by late January 2024.

Most of U. S. Steel-Granite City Works operations will go on "indefinite idle" as was noted in the WARN notice sent out to over 1,000 workers at the facility. The issuance of the WARN notice was confirmed by both U. S. Steel representatives and Madison County officials.

The Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) Act of 1988 is a U.S. labor law that protects employees, their families, and communities by requiring most

employers with 100 or more employees to provide notification 60 calendar days in advance of planned closings and mass layoffs of employees.

An estimated 600 of the workers notified are expected to be added to the company's Granite City layoffs beginning Jan. 28, 2024, following the 400 workers who were laid off in September 2023 with the idling of the "B" blast furnace.

U. S. Steel officials said that while they had previously announced its decision back in September to temporarily idle Blast Furnace 'B' at Granite City Works, this WARN notice was being issued because it is now expected that the idling will last more than six months. Employees already on layoff with the previous announcement would stay on layoff;

additional employees would be affected starting in late January.

In an email correspondence received by the Illinois Business Journal from a U. S. Steel media spokesperson, it was noted, "U. S. Steel has indefinitely idled Granite City's primary operations and will meet customer demand by leveraging the Company's active iron and steelmaking facilities. This action was taken in order to help ensure melt capacity is balanced with our order book. Accordingly, the Company has sent the required notices to employees who potentially may be affected. We thank our employees for their contributions and will keep them informed throughout this process."

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