

# Rural Idaho's Secret Weapon: The College of Southern Idaho

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Southern Idaho Economic Development Organization

A community college is often just a building providing employment for educators and classes for post-secondary students. Rarely does a local two-year college get directly involved with promoting and supporting local business and economic development. In a unique and highly beneficial alliance, The College of Southern Idaho is a vital partner in economic development for this rural region.

The College of Southern Idaho (CSI) has – since its inception – been proactive and supportive in all efforts related to economic development in this area. Numerous comprehensive and highly specialized business-related training programs have been developed or enhanced as a result of the college's close business industry relationship.

CSI works closely with area businesses to develop a tailored program that will enhance the capabilities of future and current employees. CSI's visionary president, Dr. Jerry Beck has established a strong business community/college partnership not often found with a college, particularly a two-year school. CSI formalizes, develops, oversees and implements busi-

ness-specific curriculum to support the growing and expanding economic development campaign in the region.

In fact, the quality and quantity of training programs developed by CSI for southern Idaho's workforce was a vital factor for many new companies that have opened operations here – Dell Computer, WOW Logistics, Seastrom Manufacturing, Jayco, Dutchmen Manufacturing and Hilex-Poly – and credited to the expansion of several other established businesses including Solo Cup and WestFarm Foods.

“Without question, CSI has played a crucial role in the success of both new business recruitment and local expansions that southern Idaho has enjoyed over the last eight years,” said Jan Rogers, executive director of Southern Idaho Economic Development Organization (SIEDO). “The region's success of significant new capital investments and established businesses growth would never have reached the level we enjoy today with without CSI. Their impact is, we believe, unprecedented in the country.”

Just one example illustrates CSI's impact on economic development. CSI was instrumental in bringing Dell Computer Corporation's first Technical Support Center to the Mountain Time zone in Twin Falls in 2002. A key criterion for Dell was job training and the opportunity for potential job applicants to pursue and be trained in advanced areas of technical support. CSI's history in establishing like curriculum for other area businesses impressed Dell. CSI's president told them that the college would provide training for employees for as long as the company was sited in Twin Falls. And CSI has lived up to that promise.

A technical support-training course is now offered every semester at CSI. This not only maintains a constant pipeline for Dell but for other employers seeking technically trained employees. Because of the success of their center, Dell announced in spring 2007 that it would convert the center from a consumer support to a business support center retaining all current employees.

While this effort on behalf of Dell might seem “over and above” the call of economic development duty, CSI considers it par for the course. In 2005, CSI announced that monies from a \$1.46 million U.S. Department of Labor grant would be used to accelerate the delivery of qualified health care professionals to the workplace and increase retention of health care professionals by providing dual entry, accepting applicants twice per year and fast tracks.

With additional cash and in-kind contributions from 17 other regional partners, the total value of the grant comes to almost \$2.5-million. The grant has been used to accommodate more students into entry-level health care jobs such as certified nursing assistants. It expanded CSI's partnerships, capacity, and ongoing training delivery to put CNA's, licensed practical nurses, and paramedics on fast-track training toward becoming registered nurses. Curricula, equipment and textbooks of participating K-12 school districts has been enhanced



through the grant to allow more students to complete their pre-entry health occupations core requirements before coming to CSI. The project will serve 2,300 people,

Construction of a \$21.3 million, 72,400 square foot Health Science building currently underway, will support the additional space needed for new equipment, labs and classrooms for a growing student base.

Another USDOL \$2 million grant was awarded to CSI this January will be used to make training in certain industry-based programs more accessible and up to industry standards. CSI will be able to upgrade equipment and labs to provide more workers with the skills they need to succeed and meet employer's growing skills demand. CSI and partners will improve equipment and training facilities for law enforcement, radiological technology, metal fabrication and welding and on-line learning. CSI will also apply to develop a new dental hygiene program to meet regional needs.

CSI and its partners are providing more than \$1.2 million worth of funding, building space and personnel to the grant, bringing the overall value to more than \$3.2 million.

"Industry has told us to find solutions," said CSI president Dr. Jerry Beck of the pending improvements. "We need to modernize and keep up with industry standards in order to provide training of value to our students and our industry partners."

Con Paulos, who chairs the Statewide Workforce Development Council, one of the grant partners, said this funding will reach out to workers not only in southern Idaho but the entire state. The project is expected to impact more than 1,400 people and develop a talent pool for five high growth industries and technologies.

Additionally, it will complement another recent Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development grant. The WIRED grant helps the current and prospective workforce in the region afford and obtain more training in high demand jobs.

Both grants were awarded thanks to the extensive engagement between CSI and numerous industry sectors. Working closely together, they identified gaps in meeting labor pool demands, identified efforts needed to fill those gaps, and found ways to secure a pipeline of qualified employees to help stabilize the labor pool market for employers and employees alike.

"While it may be challenging to specifically identify the number of businesses and workers who will be positively effected by CSI's new programs supported by these major grants, we're certain the impact will be felt for decades to come," said SIEDO's Jan Rogers. "CSI takes real world feedback from businesses and finds a way to make it work in the education arena."

If a college or university is to be a partner in economic development, they must be willing to work closely with the business community to develop education and training programs to meet their needs. CSI continues to design innovative curriculum to support the area's economic development efforts. And CSI considers its economic partnership a most valuable one. 🏡

# When It Comes To Your Business

## Our Peaks and Valleys Are Exceptional

In life or business, very few can say their valleys are as rewarding as their peaks. But there's a magic here that evens out everything, life is better and business is better. It's the perfect balance; one look, two valleys, the best of both worlds.



Another plus is the College of Southern Idaho, not to mention some of the lowest energy costs in the nation. The Magic Valley is home to companies like Dell Corporation's Technical Support Center and Jayco, Inc.

The Wood River Valley is just a short drive from the Magic Valley and is the destination of choice for visitors from all over the world. Home to Sun Valley and some of Hollywood's biggest stars, the Wood River Valley offers what some call the best fly fishing in the United States, not to mention some of the finest skiing anywhere on this earth. This valley offers a lifestyle and recreational opportunities worth working for.

Whether you're looking for large scale or upscale manufacturing or an unparalleled lifestyle, the good news is within a little over an hour you can experience both of our valleys.

With one of the deepest canyons in the Northwest and the mighty Snake river running through it, the Magic Valley offers excitement and plenty of open spaces for a company scoping out a large-area manufacturing facility with easy distribution access. If you're focus is on a major retail center with a strong, versatile workforce and affordable housing, this is it.

To be in your long-term vision, we know we must meet a very specific list of criteria before business relocation. We also know, all things being equal, one look at the Valleys of Southern Idaho and you'll feel a renewal and excitement about your business you haven't felt for years. The Wood River and Magic Valley, the best of both worlds.

This may be the only place where higher peaks and lower valleys make for the best business in the world.

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