

# A LOCALLY TRAINED WORKFORCE FOR INDUSTRY

## *The Culture Runs Deep in Southern Idaho*

By Lisa Buddecke and Jan Rogers, Southern Idaho Economic Development Organization

**B**usiness recruitment and business expansion. A plethora of factors contribute to a community securing either of these. The bottom line aside, the ability for employers to hire well-trained workers in a community can make or break a deal. Community leaders have to prove trained citizens are available not only to meet immediate hiring needs, but will support long-term industry growth.

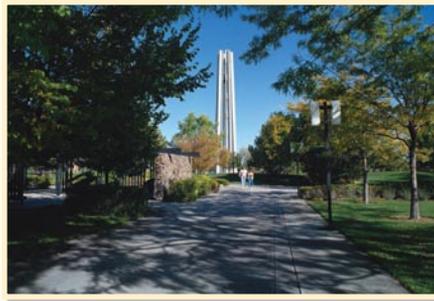
Designing and implementing a comprehensive workforce training program requires a long-term strategy in a wide range of industries. For southern Idaho, workforce development and training began 30 years ago. This decades-long effort has paid off handsomely. Numerous businesses have been recruited to southern Idaho during this time with thousands of workers hired as a result. And the vast majority of those workers have been involved in the College of Southern Idaho's broad-based workforce development and training program.

### **The College of Southern Idaho Leads the Way**

The foundation of the region's economic and workforce success is thanks largely to the visionary efforts that began back in 1984 at The College of Southern Idaho (CSI). This two-year community college has been proactive and supportive in all efforts related to economic development in southern Idaho. A culture of supporting business – doing whatever it takes in regards to employee training, education or industry-tailored curriculum – has been well established. This unique partnership between education and industry has been

vital to the decades of successes this region has enjoyed.

"We were considering several locations in 2005 when looking to build a plant to service the West Coast," said Mike Schutz, regional manufacturing manager of Hilex Poly. Hilex Poly, the largest manufacturer of plastic grocery bags in the United States, opened in 2005 a 150,000 square foot facility in the southern Idaho community of Jerome and has since expanded and grown its operation.



*College of Southern Idaho - Twin Falls, Idaho*

"Workforce availability and the potential for securing customized employee training was one key factor in our consideration of where to relocate," Schutz said. "The College of Southern Idaho came to us early on and offered a range of resources to support a new Hilex Poly facility in southern Idaho. Their proven ability to offer that was an important factor in us choosing Jerome. CSI provided resources to assist us in hiring staff, processing applications and future opportunities for tailored training once we were established. CSI continues to provide testing services for potential employees that are critical to maintain a workforce that out performs our competition and is one of the best

within our company. What CSI has to offer was and still is significant to our operations here."

### **Visionary Presidents Build the Foundation**

In the early 1980's, CSI's visionary president recognized the importance of supporting regional industry and promoting economic development through innovative curriculum. "CSI continues to expand upon the economic development gains established at the college many decades ago," explained Dr. Todd Schwartz, executive vice president and chief academic officer at CSI. "As any past or current CSI staffer will confirm, CSI's culture of supporting businesses by assuring every worker is trained for their job remains to this day. We are closely involved with business recruitment and expansion deals often sitting at table during the earliest discussions. And many new businesses have chosen southern Idaho for new operations because of CSI's very industry-employee-driven focus. CSI is proud of our 'whatever it takes' attitude toward quality employee training," Schwartz said.

### **Local & Beyond**

In southern Idaho's economic development circles, CSI is known as the region's "secret weapon" in local investments, hiring, training and curriculum development for business. CSI has been instrumental in luring new companies to the region including Chobani, Clif Bar, C3/ CustomerContactChannels, WEL Companies, WOW Logistics and DOT Foods.

This June, CSI took their commitment a step further - hiring a director of



*Hilex Poly works with CSI to help train their workforce*

workforce development. “By having someone full time to lead CSI’s charge in furthering the region’s workforce development efforts, we’ll be better able to keep out in front of the needs of our industry sectors and offer more CSI services to them,” Schwartz said.

Several universities including The University of Idaho, Idaho State University and Boise State University have a significant presence on CSI’s campus to support advanced degrees or trade specific certification for local students.

**Funds Build Programs**

Since 2011, CSI has secured nearly \$6 million in grants to jump start or expand a wide variety of workforce development and training programs. All are designed to strengthen the region’s availability of a skilled labor pool. CSI’s new Food Quality Management Degree, funded by a \$2.5 million grant award, has allowed the college to create the first degree program of its kind in Idaho. Curriculum is designed in partnership with local food processors including Chobani, Glanbia Foods, Jerome Cheese, Idaho Milk Products, ConAgra and McCain Foods. CSI students will be trained in basic food processing skills, processes covering several types of food manufacturing and tailored training in industry specific technical positions. Glanbia, the world’s largest producer of American style cheese with headquarters and several operations in southern Idaho, already has an apprenticeship program with CSI for maintenance and electrical training.

“Economic development can only be successful when industry can hire employees trained and ready to work,” CSI’s Dr. Schwartz said. “Business sustainability requires that workers have the opportunity to upgrade their skills or earn advanced degrees while employed. We want to make sure every CSI student and employee studying at CSI is prepared to either step right into the workplace

or take the next step in obtaining an advanced degree. All our programs are designed to meet those criteria. Employees can stay in southern Idaho and gain as much education and work training as they would like. Businesses appreciate that employees can stay locally and still be educated and trained on a competitive national level. It’s a win-win situation for everyone,” he said. 🏭

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