



opportunityreturns

Creating more jobs for today and tomorrow

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
Rod R. Blagojevich – Governor

news

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CONTACTS:

Cheryle Jackson	312/814.3158
Abby Ottenhoff	312/814.3158
Rebecca Rausch	217/782.7355
Gerardo Cardenas	312/814.3158
Andrew Ross	312/814.8193 (DCEO)
Mica Matsoff	312/814.0099 (IDES)

**GOV. BLAGOJEVICH ANNOUNCES ILLINOIS LED THE NATION
IN APRIL IN NEW JOBS CREATED**

Governor Also Highlights Record Rise of Economic Impact of Tourism and Visitors to Illinois; Announces \$3.1 Million for Innovative Job Training Program to Address Critical Shortages of Industrial Workers in Chicagoland Area

CHICAGO – Gov. Rod R. Blagojevich announced today that Illinois added more new jobs than any other state in April. In April, Illinois led the nation in monthly job growth, creating 23,100 new jobs. This is the first time Illinois has led the nation in monthly job growth since January 1995. With 43,600 new jobs created during the past three consecutive months, Illinois is currently ranked fourth in the nation in job creation in 2006. These statistics were compiled by the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Illinois Department of Employment Security.

Since January 2004, Illinois has gained 118,600 new jobs, which are more new jobs than any Midwest state. Over the last several weeks, Illinois has seen a number of companies commit to adding thousands of new jobs across the state, including the Chrysler Group in Belvidere, Triumph Foods in East Moline, Pabst Brewing Company in Woodridge, ZincOx Resources in Sauget and Justrite Manufacturing in Mattoon. *Site Selection Magazine* named the Chicagoland area as the top metro region in 2005 for attracting new and expanded corporate facilities. Illinois was ranked third in the nation in this category.

Professional and Business Services added 10,000 new jobs in April – its largest gain since October 1999 – and the Leisure and Hospitality industry added 6,000 more jobs. The Chicagoland area and Peoria reported their lowest unemployment rate for April in six years, with the Chicago-Naperville-Joliet rate falling by 1.5 points from the same month one year earlier. This is the largest decrease since March 1995.

The Governor also released new data on the growth of the tourism industry in Illinois. In 2005, travel to Illinois directly accounted for more than 300,000 Illinois jobs, including more than 400 new jobs in 2005, that generated nearly \$7.9 billion in payroll. Economic impact generated by travel spending in 2005 in Illinois grew to a record \$26.2 billion, an increase of 6.8 percent, generating \$1.84 billion in state and local tax revenue, according to the Travel Industry Association of America. This added an additional \$74.2 million in state and local taxes in 2005.

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Illinois' total domestic person-trip volume also increased to a record high of 90.78 million visitors in 2005, according to D.K. Shifflet & Associates. Illinois' strong growth was largely spurred by a 10.7 percent increase in business travel.

Overseas visitors have climbed by 39 percent over the past two years greatly contributing to Illinois' growth, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce. There was an 18 percent increase in the number of overseas visitors in 2005. More than 1.1 million people from around the globe came to Illinois making it the 6th most popular U.S. state for overseas travelers. The economic impact generated by international travel spending in Illinois also increased by 11.5 percent to nearly \$1.7 billion. Illinois also increased its share of the overseas market – increasing its market share to 5.3 percent from 4.8 percent.

“We’ve come roaring back from the recession that took away so many jobs between 2000 and 2003. We led the nation in job growth in April, more tourists are visiting Illinois than ever, and we continue to keep doing everything possible to bring new businesses and jobs here. You attract companies and jobs by making sure that income and sales taxes don’t go up, by making sure that local schools are effective, by making sure that our communities are safe – in short, by making Illinois a place that people want to work in and live in. That’s what we’ve been doing for more than three years. The evidence clearly shows our strategy is working. And it’s what we’ll continue to do,” Gov. Blagojevich said.

The Governor and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity have recently provided business investment packages to several companies across the state that have or will be creating even more new jobs, including 2,500 jobs at the Chrysler Group in Belvidere and several of its suppliers; 1,000 jobs at Triumph Foods in East Moline; 140 jobs ZincOx Resources in Sauget; 31 jobs at Pabst Brewing Company in Woodridge; and 35 jobs at Justrite Manufacturing in Mattoon.

The Governor also announced more than **\$3.1 million** in *Opportunity Returns* funding to help meet projected shortages in the manufacturing and transportation, logistics and warehousing sectors in Northeast Illinois through the Critical Skills Shortage Initiative (CSSI), a nationally-recognized job training program, which is being replicated in Indiana and has been recognized by the US Department of Labor. CSSI has been lauded as a model for helping people on a regional basis learn the skills they need to get ahead across Illinois.

Over the next four years, Northeast Illinois is expected to face annual shortages of more than 4,100 workers in high demand areas in manufacturing, which, if left unfilled, will present major challenges to the region’s economic vitality. Through an unprecedented network of partnerships, the Governor’s Critical Skills Shortage Initiative builds strong “pipelines” of qualified workers for key industry sectors, so that the employer needs of tomorrow are already being met with targeted training programs today. As a result of this investment, more than 1,000 workers will be trained to enter or advance in the local workforce.

There is a new manufacturing industry emerging that is driven by innovation and advancements in technology, budding with well-paying job opportunities, and as vital to keeping the wheels of economic growth in motion in Illinois today as ever before.

Yet the Northeast Illinois regional economy is facing serious short-term and long-term shortages of skilled workers because of several interrelated factors, including a skill gap between worker supply and industry demand, manufacturers creating new jobs at a faster rate than they can fill them, and the aging of Illinois’ manufacturing workforce necessitating the replacement of large numbers of retiring skilled workers.

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To directly address this shortage, CSSI is implementing targeted training programs with educational and industry partners across the region. They include:

City of Chicago, Mayor's Office of Workforce Development will collaborate with Ford Motor Company, Daley College, the Illinois Institute of Technology, and Comau Pico, a leading provider of advanced manufacturing equipment and software, to develop a customized skills training program. The program will target incumbent workers that have an interest in advancing to skilled maintenance and repair positions at the Ford Chicago Assembly Plant and its Stamping Plant. The objective of the program is to provide required foundational and high-tech skills and knowledge to employees who will transition from unskilled/low-skilled labor positions to these new maintenance and repair positions. **(Linda Kaiser – 312/553.4430)**

College of DuPage will administer the "Skills for Success" training program. The program includes a bridge program that will support enrollment and success in college certification programs and an industry partnership program component focusing on the advancement of incumbent workers. **(Mary Beth Marshall – 630/495.4345 x 257)**

Commission on Economic Opportunity, Inc., in cooperation with South Suburban, Moraine Valley, and Prairie State Colleges, will provide individuals with the skills needed for critical skill shortage occupations. The project design includes a career progression component and intensive case management/support services to improve the success of students. **(Anne Hogan – 312/603.0203)**

Elgin Community College has invested \$1.5 million in the purchase of state-of-the-art instruction equipment for its Integrated Systems/Maintenance Technology (IS/MT) program. However, while many business partners provide release time so their workers can obtain training, they lack the funds needed to pay for skill assessment and the actual cost of training. This program will offset these costs and upgrade the skills of existing employees through customized training programs for maintenance and repair workers and industrial machinery mechanics. **(Mary Pepperl – 847/699.9195)**

Greater West Town Community Development Project's Solid Surface Manufacturing Training Program, a state certified, nationally accredited vocational training program, prepares individuals for careers with manufacturing companies and distributors. The program is operated in cooperation with area employers and economic development organizations. **(Linda Kaiser – 312/553.4430)**

Joliet Junior College's Institute of Economic Technology, through a partnership with Three Rivers Manufacturer's Association, will promote careers in manufacturing and provide training that supports entry or advancement into critical skill shortage occupations. **(Pat Fera – 815/727.5670)**

Northeast Community College Consortium, a partnership of Moraine Valley Community College, South Suburban College, and Prairie State College, will provide training that allows individuals to advance from production occupations to higher level production "plus" occupations. The program design includes extensive testing and assessment of individuals, a bridge program component addressing basic skill deficiencies, and customized, skills training specific to eight critical skill shortage occupations and employer needs. Through a second project, the Consortium, will address basic skill gaps of dislocated workers and provide training through existing programs to prepare individuals for employment in a variety of critical skill shortage occupations. **(Anne Hogan – 312/603.0203)**

The Aurora Hispanic Chamber of Commerce will offer core bi-lingual courses in shop mathematics, adult
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basic education, measurements/blue prints, essential soft skills and advanced technology. In partnership with employers, training specific to developing skills and knowledge required for critical skill shortage occupations will be provided. **(Pamela Fettes – (630/859.9923)**

Triton College in partnership with area employers will administer the Manufacturing Skill Development Program. This certificate training program will prepare individuals for entry-level employment in welding occupations. Additionally, a bridge program component focuses on basic skills needed to complete training. **(Anne Hogan – 312/603.0203)**

William Rainey Harper College will utilize a maintenance tech curriculum that supports career pathways into manufacturing occupations. Individuals will be prepared for entry-level employment and for advancement in manufacturing occupations utilizing existing capacity in its AAS and certification programs. **(Mary Pepperl – 847/699.9195)**

“Gov. Blagojevich and I are committed to making the kinds of investments that are critical to fostering a more vibrant local economy and creating quality jobs. By training these workers for frontline positions, we’re not only helping them obtain well paying, high quality jobs, but strengthening and invigorating key industries that will position the local economy for more dynamic growth over the near and long term,” said State Senator Debbie Halvorson (D-Chicago Heights).

“A tremendous key to strengthening the economic future is helping provide our workers with the training they need to meet the demands of their fields and the challenges in our region. The Critical Skills Shortage Initiative is an innovative training program that will create more good jobs in professions that are critical to the vitality of our local economy. Gov. Blagojevich continues to make the kinds of investments that matter most to this community,” said State Senator Rickey Hendon (D-Chicago).

“Gov. Blagojevich’s Critical Skills Shortage Initiative will expand opportunity in our workforce and ensure that these vital industry sectors continue to act as an engine of economic growth. This is a win-win for the people of our community and a great investment in our future,” said State Senator Donne Trotter (D-Chicago).

“Gov. Blagojevich and I agree that a strong workforce makes for a strong economy. I’m glad the Governor recognizes the best way to keep Illinois’ economic expansion on track is to invest in improving the skills of our workforce. The innovative public-private partnership between DCEO and the Aurora Hispanic Chamber of Commerce will help develop the skills workers need to compete for jobs and improve economic growth,” State Rep. Linda Chapa LaVia (D-Aurora) said.

“Gov. Blagojevich understands that one of the best investments we can make is in our workforce. The Critical Skills Shortage Initiative is an innovative effort to get more people quality jobs in professions that are vital to the competitiveness of our local economy,” said State Rep. Annazette Collins (D-Chicago).

“Gov. Blagojevich's *Opportunity Returns* strategy is about meeting the needs of business, while providing workers the means to reach their full professional potential. Through the Critical Skills Shortage Initiative, we're making important strides at achieving both goals,” State Rep. Marlow Colvin (D-Chicago) said.

As in manufacturing, the transportation, logistics and warehousing sectors are all facing major projected shortages in skilled labor in the coming years. Over the next four years, Northeast Illinois is expected to face
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annual shortages of more than 7,300 workers in these high demand areas. As a result of this investment, almost 900 workers will be trained to enter or advance in the local workforce. Partnerships with stakeholders designed to address these shortages include:

Business and Career Services, Inc., the northwest suburban one-stop center partnership, in collaboration with the Greater O'Hare Association of Industry and Commerce, the International Business Center, William Rainey Harper College, economic development partners, and employers, will address the training needs of the area's largest freight forwarding industry located in the O'Hare International Airport metro Chicago corridor. The focus of this project is the delivery of training solutions that will result in the placement and/or advancement of individuals into high skilled positions within a broad category of customer service occupations. **(Mary Pepperl – 847/699.9195)**

DuPage County Workforce Development Division will assist job seekers in completing training, obtaining credentials/licensures, and obtaining employment in truck driving occupations. **(Mary Beth Marshall – 630/495.4345 x 257)**

Greater West Town Community Development, in partnership with employers, will provide individuals with training through its Shipping and Receiving Training Program. The program addresses workplace safety, warehouse operations, computerized shipping and tracking, inventory control and forklift operations. Individuals will acquire skills that prepare them for employment as customer service representatives, computer support specialists, and industrial truck and tractor operators. **(Linda Kaiser – 312/553.4430)**

Joliet Junior College's Institute of Economic Technology, in partnership with economic development partners, will provide individuals with electrical/electronic technician, welding, machine tool technology, forklift operator, and/or radio frequency identification technology training. Training will be offered to incumbent workers and job seekers, with an emphasis on the recruitment of women into training. **(Pat Fera – 815/727.5670)**

National Able Network will administer a program that will produce a trained pool of commercial driver's license (CDL) certified drivers for employers in the Chicago area. The programs include a comprehensive assessment of candidates and strategies to address barriers that threaten successful completion of CDL training. **(Linda Kaiser – 312/553.4430)**

Northeast Community College Consortium, a partnership of Moraine Valley Community College, South Suburban College, and Prairie State College, will administer two projects. Utilizing capacity that exists at the three area colleges, dislocated workers will be trained for and obtain employment in truck driver, mechanic, machinist, computer support specialist, and welder/cutter/solderer/brazier occupations. Additionally, customized training will be offered to entry-level employees working at transportation, warehousing and logistics firms in the south and southwest area of suburban Cook County to support advancement into higher paying, skilled trade occupations. **(Anne Hogan – 312/603.0203)**

Olive-Harvey College will administer a bridge program that will include exposure to transportation, warehousing and logistics career information, contextualized basic skills development and occupational training. Additionally, through cohort classes, incumbent workers and job seekers will be offered increased opportunities to advance/obtain employment as diesel mechanics, locomotive engineers, dispatchers, electric and electronic technicians, and truck/bus drivers with public transit and trucking firms. **(Linda Kaiser – 312/553.4430)**

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Richard J. Daley College will initiate a bridge program that focuses on preparation for employment in machinist mechanic positions. This customized training program was developed with strong employer involvement – ensuring that trainees acquire the skills that are needed. Project partners include the Mayor’s Office of Workforce Development, the Chicago Federation of Labor Workers Assistance Committee (CFL-WAC), SER Central States Jobs for Progress, and Southeast Chicago Development Commission. (**Linda Kaiser – 312/553.4430**)

TEC Services, Incorporated will administer an accelerated, hands-on training program focused on technology, business and employability skills. The program will be available to in-school and out-of-school youth who are interested in acquiring the skills needed for the Computer Support Specialist occupation. In addition to content instruction and hands-on activities, students will participate in technology and business projects that affirm and enhance technical, troubleshooting, teamwork, employability, communication and project management skills. Core technical skills will include the ability to build, maintain, upgrade and repair computers; to use the Internet for technical support; to identify personal contributions to corporate business plans and objectives; and to perform network troubleshooting. (**Linda Kaiser – 312/553.4430**)

United Parcel Service will utilize a combination of both classroom and on-the-job training to increase employee knowledge of both computer and systems technology. This training will result in the advancement of incumbent workers. (**Mary Beth Marshall – 630/495.4345 x 257**)

CSSI, which is being replicated by Indiana, has been one of Gov. Blagojevich’s top *Opportunity Returns* priorities. The CSSI manufacturing program follows the launch of the CSSI health care initiative, which is training more than 800 registered nurses and other health care professionals to pursue careers in better-paying jobs. Gov. Blagojevich provided almost **\$3.6 million** to support the health care training in Northeast Illinois region that will address those critical shortages in the local workforce. An earlier nearly **\$1.5 million** planning grant was used by stakeholders from throughout the region, including the Local Workforce Investment Boards, area employers, economic development professionals, educators and service providers, to identify industry sectors, and specific occupations within those sectors, where there are current or projected shortages of skilled workers.

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) is administering the Critical Skills Shortage Initiative (CSSI) for Northeast Illinois.

“By bringing together the region’s stakeholders who work day-in and day-out in the local manufacturing industry, we can craft creative solutions that will make an enormous impact in this community. CSSI is a grassroots initiative to ensure a stronger, better future for working families in Northeast Illinois and is a real testament to Gov. Blagojevich’s innovative leadership in workforce development. As Illinois continues to add more new jobs, we are helping people across the state learn the skills they need to land those jobs today and in the future,” DCEO Director Jack Lavin said.

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