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EASTERN/SOUTH BRANCH ALLIANCE SECURES MANCHIN'S VISION

In his inauguration address now some 30 months ago, Governor Joe Manchin pledged to “do what is best for our state, our children and our grandchildren.” And basic to that effort, he said, “Every child should be taught a marketable skill.”

Combine that promise with his repeatedly stated belief that “an educated workforce is the key to economic development,” and no one should wonder that the state’s community and technical colleges find themselves at the center of Manchin’s vision for West Virginia’s future.

“Our workforce will be ready to respond to the challenges of today’s changing marketplace,” he recently insisted, “because of our outstanding commitment to career and technical education.”

Signaling their dedication to turn the Governor’s promises into reality, two area learning centers have joined forces in a new partnership program that will “offer students a business/technical foundation,” said Larry Bloom, academic program director for industrial technologies at Eastern WV Community and Technical College, “and the knowledge and skills to enter the technical labor market.”

Skilled Technicians Earn

Called “Technical Studies in Industrial Equipment Maintenance,” the program prepares learners for careers as skilled technicians in the field of industrial equipment maintenance. “With this educational background, delivered jointly by Eastern and the South Branch Career and Technical Center, management positions in business and industry would then emerge as realistic goals for those graduates. And they would even be able to start-up their own businesses,” Bloom said.

“The government’s Department of Labor reports that in the Cumberland and nearby West Virginia area, people entering this field earn on average close to 30-thousand dollars annually,” Bloom noted. “And the average pay scale rises to almost 50-thousand per year for more experienced workers.”

Under the schools’ new Technical Studies partnership agreement, students will focus on the technical subjects at South Branch. Applying classroom ideas through hands-on activities, learners will acquire and sharpen skills in electrical maintenance, hydraulics and pneumatic systems, industrial and commercial wiring, and rotating devices and control circuitry.

“And Eastern will provide the related general education courses covering computers, math, business and science,” Bloom explained, “and certain electives specific to the major.” A flexible format allows learners to choose a series of classes that will lead

either to a 32-credit hour Certificate or a 62-credit hour Associate in Applied Sciences (AAS) degree.

Enables Swift Advancement

Reviewing the necessary training and qualifications for several types of jobs in this field, the labor department's Occupational Outlook Handbook for 2006-07 commends community and technical college programs that not only lead to a certificate of completion or an associate degree, "but also enable trainee technicians to advance to the journey, or experienced worker, level sooner than would otherwise be possible." And with advancement, Bloom pointed out, come pay hikes.

Recent research cited and admired this June in a National Governors' Association Best Practices brief, shows that real-world, applied learning techniques dynamically engage and motivate students in technical education. "The studies also indicate that combining the hands-on learning with general education in the classroom significantly improves student achievement," observed Bloom. "And they show that those students enjoy better graduation rates and higher job earnings."

For more information about this career-oriented Technical Studies program, Eastern's financial aid opportunities, other programs of study and workforce and community education, call toll free: 877-982-2322; or check the College's website: "www.eastern.wvnet.edu".

Serving the residents of Grant, Hampshire, Hardy, Mineral, Pendleton and Tucker counties, Eastern West Virginia Community and Technical College is a comprehensive and equal opportunity community and technical college bringing the resources and assets of Education That Works to the families, communities and employers of the Potomac Highlands.