

## **ARKANSAS NORTHEASTERN COLLEGE TO OFFER FREE WORKFORCE READINESS PROGRAMS**

### **PARTNERS WITH BIG RIVER STEEL FOR FUTURE HIRING PROCESS**

**OSCEOLA, Arkansas** As Arkansas' newest super-project, Big River Steel, begins construction in Mississippi County, Arkansas Northeastern College (ANC) has announced two workforce readiness programs to aid local residents hoping to join the company's team — both offered at no cost to the student.

In preliminary meetings with representatives of Big River Steel, ANC recognized the company's desire to provide job opportunities to residents of the local community. To meet those needs, ANC's workforce training division, The Solutions Group, will focus on providing all levels of job preparation.

“Providing accessible educational and training opportunities is our mission, and we are proud to offer workforce training to our local companies and new companies coming to the area such as Big River Steel. The Solutions Group has garnered national recognition for its innovation and flexibility, and we are glad to offer that experience and knowledge to the economic development of this region,” said Dr. James Shemwell, President of Arkansas Northeastern College.

ANC's Construction Technology and Workforce Orientation & Retraining Keys (WORK) programs have been implemented prior to Big River Steel's location to the area to get a head start on meeting the employment needs that will arise as well as several other announced projects such as BlueOak Arkansas, SMS Millcraft, Mid-River Terminal, Jefferson Iron & Metal, and future not-yet-known ventures.

Working in partnership with the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services, ANC also will assist Big River Steel in its hiring procedure by funneling the application process through its website and Workforce Development Office. The company is partnering with ANC to oversee the large amount of job seekers expected. This will provide a consistent and uncomplicated method by which to apply for a position within the company as well as learn about available training opportunities. The ANC website will post the application procedure as soon as the hiring process is ready which is expected to occur in the spring of 2015.

“Every individual inquiring about a job is important to us,” said Mark Bula, Chief Commercial Officer for Big River Steel. “We want applicants to have access to consistent information about available opportunities for employment and related training. As such, we look forward to working closely with Arkansas Northeastern College as we begin to implement our hiring plans.”

Additionally, ANC will work with the contractors selected by Big River Steel to supply training for construction skills so that the level of local employees will be maximized. ANC has already implemented a new certificate program in Construction Technology to begin preparing individuals as several new companies in the area increase the need for construction employees, including the Big River Steel mill which will require approximately 2,000 workers. While Big River Steel serves as a catalyst for the execution of both ANC's WORK Program and the Construction Technology Certificate Program, these programs are designed to prepare workers for a number of employment opportunities with a wide variety of local companies.

“It’s an exciting time in Mississippi County as growth becomes a reality. It will have an impact throughout our entire region, and we are proud to implement new programs to meet the needs of our local companies and citizens. To this effort, we expand our training region-wide and partner with our sister institutions to maximize the training potential,” said Gene Bennett, ANC Dean for Economic Development.

ANC is working in cooperation with other colleges in the Arkansas Delta Training & Education Consortium (ADTEC), including Arkansas State University-Newport, East Arkansas Community College, and Mid-South Community College, so that those colleges also may offer programs as a regional initiative in the very near future.

One such program conceived by ANC is Workforce Orientation & Retraining Keys (WORK). This 60-clock hour program was developed to provide basic workplace skills to members of the community with little or no prior work experience.

“We’re already seeing success with our WORK program,” said Bennett who added that the training was designed to lift unemployed individuals out of poverty and give them the skills to become employable. “There are a lot of jobs out there and a lot of jobs coming. We need able bodied people ready to fill them.”

The WORK Program provides individuals with the necessary skills and support network to access economic opportunity. Community mentors work with each WORK participant throughout the eight weeks of training and extending until the participant has successfully maintained employment for 90 days.

WORK participants have the opportunity to earn financial incentives during training to help remove barriers to employment, such as funds to purchase work clothes or specialized footwear. Completers of the WORK program have the opportunity to obtain a certificate of WORK completion, an American Heart Association CPR card, a Career Readiness Certificate (CRC), and job interview opportunities with local employers. WORK represents a comprehensive partnership effort among Arkansas Northeastern College, the Great River Economic Development Foundation, the Mississippi County Equal Opportunity Commission, area industries, community and faith-based leaders, and the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation. Those interested in the WORK Program can contact Coordinator Doug Echols at 870-838-9905.

Additionally, the Construction Technology Program is designed to prepare students for entry level construction jobs. Students are taught the basics of construction safety, math, and power and hand tools. Students also develop skills in construction welding, concrete finishing, rigging, and light equipment usage. The goal of the program is to help the student acquire skills that can be used to enter the workplace and be a versatile member of a construction team. This program can be completed in only one semester or less. Individuals interested in Construction Technology can contact Kortnie Driskill at 870-763-6222.

In an effort to expand the local workforce to meet growing needs, both the certificate program in Construction Technology and the WORK Program are offered at no cost to students. Additionally, both programs are short-term (either 10 or 16 weeks for construction and eight weeks for WORK) to provide individuals a fast-track to employment.

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