

Governor's Initiative Retrains Workers to Meet COVID-19 Challenge

Workforce Board, DOL and partners join to fight COVID-19 job destruction **BY GARY R. STOCKBRIDGE**

DELAWARE EMPLOYERS will soon be able to hire newly trained workers in five high demand industries as a result of training funded through the Rapid Workforce Training and Redeployment Initiative established last year by Governor John Carney.

The gubernatorial initiative, which tapped the Delaware Workforce Development Board and the Delaware Department of Labor, kicked off last August using about \$10 million in Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds made available in late March when the act was signed into law by President Donald J. Trump.

Taking advantage of Delaware's ability to quickly convene the right people, we developed an ad hoc working group to hit the ground running last September with a team that consisted of state workers from labor, education and the workforce development board, the business community, and community experts in training and workforce development.

Step one was to develop where the opportunities of the future would be – and this was a critical step and had the support of all on the team. Our training would focus on:

- Healthcare
- Construction and Trades
- Computers and Information Technologies
- Logistics and Transportation
- Hospitality and Food Service

With this complete, for step two, the staff did an incredible job of quickly deploying funds to key training providers to immediately start re-skilling and up-skilling our unemployed Delawareans and get them back to work. Key training providers in each of the focus areas would become critical partners in this effort.

With this work underway the critical third step was around business



engagement. Every member of the business community sitting around the table on this project carries a responsibility to assure each and every trained Delawarean is put back to work as soon as the training is complete. Staff also rose to the occasion again with the development of a new website that will become more and more important in linking the business community to the training we are doing; www.forwarddelaware.com. The business community has also been extremely valuable in influencing the training curriculum to

assure we are training for the right skills.

The final piece of the puzzle was the recognition that this rapid redeployment is just the first step on our road to recovery in Delaware. This means we have tapped into the outstanding team of volunteers on this effort to begin drafting and executing a long-term plan for Delaware to return to pre-COVID-19 unemployment levels. This work continues today and I want to thank all those engaged in the process – it was, and remains, a team effort to get Delawareans back to work.

As I write this, additional funds are being deployed to supplement the great work done to-date. This will bolster the numbers of trained individuals ready for the workforce in the months ahead.

Any business wanting to find out more about hiring newly trained workers can go www.forwarddelaware.com. ■



Gary Stockbridge is regional president of Delmarva Power & Atlantic City Electric. Gary also chairs the Delaware Workforce Development Board.