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OVER \$8 MILLION IN OSD WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT GRANTS AWARDED

Jonesboro, AR, March 15, 2022

Tuesday, March 15 Gov. Asa Hutchinson awarded \$8 million in grants to economic and workforce development partnerships to create training opportunities for in-demand skills and certifications. Robotics, cyber security, rural forestry, and truck driver training are just some of the workforce initiatives around the state receiving grant funding from the Department of Commerce Office of Skills Development.

Grant recipients submitted projects to the Office of Skills Development (OSD) in January, and those chosen presented their initiatives to the Career Education and Workforce Development Board (CEWD) in February, "shark tank" style. The CEWD Board selected projects in varying amounts based on their specific training program, industry sector of focus, and regional needs.

"It is critical for the state to invest in workforce development to help private industry and public education prepare for the future," said Commerce Secretary Mike Preston. "Instead of short-term intervention to relieve an immediate crisis or need, the strategy of the Arkansas Department of Commerce is to be proactive, helping to fund innovative programs that anticipate future workforce needs. The over \$8 million in grants awarded today support programs that focus on providing training for in-demand skills that will benefit Arkansas for generations to come."

The following grant recipients have projects that are the culmination of partnerships between private industry, education, and economic development organizations and the leveraging of existing resources:

- **University of Arkansas Little Rock (UALR)– \$1.956 million** for the development of a regional Cyber Learning-to-Employment (L2E) ecosystem which will provide cyber security training. The L2E will include UA Pine Bluff, Forge Institute, UA Pulaski Technical College, UA Hope-Texarkana, UACC Batesville, UACC Morrilton, UA Cossatot, the Academies of Arkansas, and the Arkansas Center for Data Sciences (ACDS). This ecosystem includes a UA System instructional consortium, the CyberLearning Network (CyberLearn), will use stackable certificates and prior learning credit to articulate credit from Forge Institute cybersecurity boot camps and registered apprenticeships through ACDS.

- **Forge Institute - \$1.68 million** for training up to 240 individuals in IT and cybersecurity over a three-year period, preparing graduates to enter the workforce of companies like Acxiom, Edafio, GSK, and others.
- **Black River Technical College - \$1.339 million** for the development of CDL truck driver training offered at no cost to individuals. This program has the potential of training up to 500 drivers within the next three years. Graduates will be able to go to work immediately, making a living wage in the trucking and transportation industry, helping to alleviate the transportation crisis in Arkansas and around the nation.
- **ASU Mountain Home - \$1.239 million** for the development of a composites program that serves marine manufacturing. The program, designed in collaboration with local boat manufacturers, prepares graduates to work locally at companies like Ranger, Vexus, Basscat, and Shawnee Boats.
- **ASU Beebe – Searcy Campus - \$686,661** for the development of a robotics curriculum designed to prepare students who wish to become Robotics Technicians. With curricular support from ASU-Beebe’s Industrial Technology, CNC, and Welding Technology programs, participants will be trained to engineer and operate automated manufacturing, specifically at local companies such as St. Jean Industries, Lomanco, and others.
- **Clark County Workforce Training Group (CCWTG) - \$421,315** for regional Millwright and Industrial Maintenance Training. This newly formed consortium, composed of Clark County businesses and industries, the Arkadelphia Area Chamber of Commerce, ASU Three Rivers, Henderson State University, and the West Central Arkansas Planning & Development District, will invest in industrial maintenance and millwright training equipment to augment current training programs.
- **South Arkansas Community College - \$259,211** for the development of a rural forestry workforce training program, which will include non-credit training, as well as certificate programs, technical certificates, and Associate degrees. This training meets the growing need of the forestry industry in Ashley County and the surrounding south Arkansas region.
- **The Innovation Hub at Winrock International - \$246,295** for Skills to Launch Training that provides new opportunities for participants committed to a career within the construction and manufacturing sectors including Industrial Maintenance, Energy Efficiency, HVAC, Construction, Roofing, and other fields.
- **North Arkansas College - \$226,000** for expansion of their CDL Truck Driving and Manufacturing programs. Graduates will qualify to enter the workforce of local companies such as Wabash, Pace, and others, as well as the trucking and transportation industries.

OSD will distribute and monitor grant funding and program outcomes over the course of the grants. OSD, a division of the Arkansas Department of Commerce, strategically invests in all levels of the Arkansas workforce, from students to incumbent workers, by raising education and skill levels, meeting the needs of companies operating in Arkansas, balancing workforce and employer interests, leading to greater economic achievement for workers and companies.

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