



Career Training Consortium hosts summit, brings region together to fill open jobs in bioeconomy and manufacturing

by Shannon McGhee

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BUILDING ILLINOIS'
BIOECONOMY CONSORTIUM

EDWARDSVILLE - The Building Illinois' Bioeconomy (BIB) Consortium, a Department of Labor-funded workforce training and education grant led by Southern Illinois University Edwardsville will host *Building Illinois' Workforce: New Skills, New Jobs in Bioeconomy and Advanced Manufacturing* from 9 a.m.-noon Thursday, March 23 in SIUE's Morris University Center.

The regional summit is designed to increase enrollment in new flexible training programs that lead to careers in the bioeconomy and advanced manufacturing industries.

It will bring together educators, economic development leaders, employers and community organizations to discuss the best way to reach Metro East residents in order to drive enrollment in training programs, and ultimately, fill open jobs across the region in advanced manufacturing, bioprocessing and biofuels technology.

“The theme with local and national employers is the same – they can’t find the skilled talent they need,” said John Caupert, executive director of the NCERC at SIUE, which provides workforce training opportunities and internships working directly with large companies. “These jobs provide solid, sustainable living wages. Employers can’t grow without filling the jobs that are open today. Building a skilled workforce is necessary for the growth of our region’s economy.”

The BIB Consortium offers programming at SIUE and partner colleges throughout the state, including Carl Sandburg College, Lewis & Clark Community College, Lincoln Land Community College and Southeastern Illinois College. Programs range from 8-week certificates, through associate’s and baccalaureate degrees.

“We developed these flexible courses, in combination with professional certifications and on-the-job training, to meet the needs of both non-traditional and traditional learners,” said Courtney Breckenridge, program manager at the BIB Consortium. “Graduates of our programs in this region have found jobs with Phillips 66, Green Plains, Inc., Kraft Foods, MilliporeSigma and Metropolitan Sewer District. The job opportunities are available. Our goal is to train more students to fill them.”

In addition to private sector jobs, graduates, like Christopher Wense, have also found employment in research. Now an ethanol plant operating technician at the NCERC, Wense developed a passion for bioprocessing after using Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) to help finance training. Wense was laid-off from the U.S. Steel plant in Granite City due to plant closures.

“I would and always will promote the Process Operations Technology (PTEC) program and NCERC. The combination of the two are a match made in heaven,” said Wense. “My experience and fortunate success after being laid off, validates my recommendation. I am incredibly thankful for this opportunity and will do all I can to promote the program, as well as the incredible NCERC experience.”

The BIB Consortium was awarded a \$10 million Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant by the Department of Labor in 2014 to develop flexible programs and develop a larger pool of skilled workers in Illinois and the St. Louis Metro East, including retraining for veterans and displaced workers. There are online options, many of which incorporate much-needed professional

certifications and internships built within the curriculum to place graduates at the top of the job pool.

The Summit is the first of two events focusing on economic development in the Metro East/St. Louis region this spring, with the other focusing on attracting new companies. From discussions at the Summit, BIB hopes to gain new partnerships and spur further interest from employers, educators, community organizations and economic development leaders to spread the word about opportunities through the Consortium. The ultimate goal is to build a qualified workforce to fill jobs and make the region's economy more competitive.

For more information about the BIB Consortium, visit buildingillinoisbio.com. Educators, economic development professionals, members of community organizations or employers in Madison or St. Clair County interested in learning more about the Summit should contact Jacqueline Pohlman at japohlm@siue.edu.

The [Building Illinois' Bioeconomy \(BIB\) Consortium](#), formed in 2014 through funding from the U.S. Department of Labor's Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) program, offers certificates and degrees, with options for stackable and latticed credentials, in Bioprocess, Process Maintenance, Bioenergy, and Water Management. The BIB Consortium, composed of five higher education institutions which span the state of Illinois, includes Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, Lewis and Clark Community College located in Godfrey, Southeastern Illinois College located in Harrisburg, Lincoln Land Community College located in Springfield, and Carl Sandburg College located in Galesburg.

[Southern Illinois University Edwardsville](#) provides students with a high quality, affordable education that prepares them for successful careers and lives of purpose to shape a changing world. Built on the foundation of a broad-based liberal education, and enhanced by hands-on research and real-world experiences, the academic preparation SIUE students receive equips them to thrive in the global marketplace and make our communities better places to live. Situated on 2,660 acres of beautiful woodland atop the bluffs overlooking the natural beauty of the Mississippi River's rich bottomland and only a short drive from downtown St. Louis, the SIUE campus is home to a diverse student body of more than 14,000.