



Former steelworker honored by Illinois Workforce Partnership

September 13 2018 2:44 PM



SPRINGFIELD — A former Granite City steelworker received recognition Thursday during the annual Illinois Workforce Partnership awards luncheon for his commitment toward rebuilding his career after being laid off.

The statewide group celebrated Jacob Smith, 34, of Highland, as the “success story” for Madison County’s Employment and Training Department. Local area workforces from across the state recognized Smith and others for their committal to programs offered by

the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) and the Trade Adjustment Assistance Act (TAA.)

“I am extremely honored by this,” Smith said.

Smith said he is grateful to the county for providing him support that he didn’t know existed until he lost his job.

“The county helped me achieve my goal of becoming an RN,” Smith said.

In 2015, after working eight years as an operating technician at U.S. Steel Corp. in Granite City, Smith found himself out of a job. Smith, who used to troubleshoot and repair various machines used in the production and manufacturing of steel, had limited job experience and needed to find a way to support his son.

Smith, who knew he wanted to change career paths, started taking nursing classes after an earlier lay off, but returned to the mill when he got called back in order to pay the bills. He also chose to continue with school — not an easy task — and worked full-time on rotating shifts and often traded with co-workers to make it to classes.

After the second lay off, Smith realized everything he was working toward was in jeopardy. Smith attended a rapid response meeting following his layoff and discovered the types of assistance he could receive.

“I had no idea there were these types of opportunities out there,” Smith said.

Employment and Training Director Tony Fuhrmann said most people do not know what’s available other than unemployment when they are “all of a sudden” out of work. He commended the IWP for recognizing Smith and others for their commitment and hard work.

“The award winners exemplify the power and possibility of the local workforce system in Illinois,” Fuhrmann said.

Fuhrmann said the job training programs the county offers to displaced workers supported Smith’s achievements and his ability to change careers.

Smith said he was determined to make it through the TAA program. He said even if U. S. Steel called him back to work he didn’t plan to go, but rather finish school because he wanted a steady career.

The TAA program helps workers who lose their jobs because of international trade get back to work. The TAA program provides laid off workers with opportunities to obtain the skills, credentials, resources and support necessary to rebuild skills for future jobs.

Due to support through Employment and Training, Smith was able to pursue his nursing degree. He also received Trade Readjustment Allowance that assisted with living expenses and help from family with his 11-year-old son.

Smith graduated in May with a Bachelor of Science degree from Maryville University and in June received his nursing license. He now works full time at Saint Louis University Hospital and as needed for Veterans Affairs at St. Louis Medical Center.

Smith said he anticipates continuing with his education in the future.

“The route I’ve taken I’ll have always a career and the possibility for advancement,” he said.

He said without Madison County he wouldn’t be where he is now.

“Job training programs like this were created specifically for this purpose,” Fuhrmann said. “It ensures workers like Jacob get the skills needed for a new career when they are displaced.”