

Program's road to success is built on private support

BY DAVID GOLL

SAN JOSE — The Workforce Institute has an educational advantage in California, a state struggling with funding cuts in higher education due to a budget deficit: Its funding is not dependent on the state budget.

Although it is part of the San Jose-Evergreen Community College District, which is caught in the budget dilemma, the institute's 35 full-time employees and myriad courses are supported directly by business and government grants.

The program has an annual budget in excess of \$7.5 million for 2010-11, according to Carol Coen, executive director of the Workforce Institute.

The model, established in 1988, supports the needs of businesses through customized training and work force development programs for employees. The programs are financially supported by Silicon Valley companies, public agencies and utilities and health care institutions.

"We develop partnerships with industry," Coen said, and there has been a big upsurge this year in corporate interest. One of her institute's major contracts is with the city of San Jose's work force investment board, providing workshops in job interviewing skills. The number of workshop participants will double this year, reaching 42,000 from the 2009-10 total of 21,000, Coen said. Jeff Ruster, executive director of San Jose's work2future program, describes the Workforce Institute as a "key partner" in providing workshops on resume writing, interviewing skills and networking to thousands of adults and at-risk youths.

The institute is also working with Pacific Gas & Electric Co. to develop and expand its work force. Laid-off firefighters and other dislocated workers, including veterans, are eligible to be trained to become PG&E line workers.

Coen said corporate downsizing has led to an increasing need among employers to



VICKI THOMPSON

PRIVATELY FUNDED: Carol Coen, executive director of the Workforce Institute, says businesses provide the center funds for customized training.

train their existing workers for additional duties they may have to take on.

"For example, a company may promote a person with technical expertise in a given area into a managerial position, but they

have no skills in business communications," said Coen, a 15-year veteran of the program. "Businesses may be doing more with less today, but they are beginning to realize they have to fund skill upgrades for

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their employees.”

Coen said her program also focuses on providing training for emerging industries likely to be hiring large numbers of employees. That includes the emerging green and energy-efficient building sectors.

“We develop certificate programs and, if there is further development in the field, full degree programs,” she said.

Model to emulate

Situated in the northwest corner of the San Jose City College campus, the Workforce Institute boasts elaborate labs to train existing and potential medical personnel in its Center for Innovative Medical Simulation and architects and others from the construction industry in the cutting-edge, five-dimensional Building Information Modeling software.

Coen is proud of the unique medical simulation lab, a veritable five-bed “hospital” full of simulated human patients ranging from a newborn to an expectant mother to a seriously injured victim of a motorcycle accident. The computerized humans manufactured by Miami-based Gaumard Scientific respond to questions posed by students and can display up to 72,000 physiological responses. Working registered nurses and those who have finished their academic work but have yet to find jobs use the lab to update their skills. Coen said 40 percent of those earning registered nursing degrees do not readily find employment in Northern California.

Kaiser Permanente provides funding and equipment for the lab, putting many of its nurses who work at Kaiser’s San Jose Medical Center through the training, according to Ingrid Thompson, grant manager for the Workforce Institute.

Trudy Johnson, chief nursing officer at the Santa Clara Valley Medical Center, collaborates with the program. Valley Medical allows nurses going through the program to get practical experience at the huge facility. Some of them end up being hired at Valley Medical.



VICKI THOMPSON

GETTING TRAINED: Students at the Workforce Institute at San Jose City College simulate an ER training for health care professionals. Nurses use the lab to update their skills while looking for employment.

“The lab fills a crucial gap for us in the community,” Johnson said. “It provides development for people who are trying to progress in their careers or move into new ones.”



Trudy Johnson

Andrew Gere, chief of operations for the San Jose Water Co., said his investor-owned company has worked with the Workforce Institute to develop a program that trains young job seekers in routine field work conducted by the water company, including watershed and pipeline maintenance, and brush clearing. A new program is expected to train existing water company employees interested in management jobs.

AT-A-GLANCE

Workforce Institute
Location: San Jose City College
Executive director: Carol Coen
Annual Budget: \$7.5 million
Founded: 1988
Employees: 35
Website: <http://ibpadvantage.com>
Phone: 408.918.5100

Coen said her organization is constantly communicating with major Silicon Valley employers like San Jose Water Co. along with its many employer advisory committees to learn the latest trends in work force development.

“Schools educate people and turn them out into the work force,” she said. “We’re always asking the employers what they need.”