

For Immediate Release

ACM-LED IT TRAINING CENTER EARNS HIGH MARKS IN MD. REPORT

CUMBERLAND, Md. – Allegany County’s workforce development initiative in information technology – the Western Maryland IT Center of Excellence – is featured prominently in a report to the Maryland legislature.

This skills-training and economic development effort, involving representatives of education, government and business and industry, was launched with support from EARN Maryland, which stands for Employment Advancement Right Now.

An EARN grant to Allegany College of Maryland allowed for the creation of a partnership of stakeholders working together to prepare a strong workforce to meet a growing number of jobs in information technology.

This Strategic Industry Partnership, created in 2014, has strived to put Allegany County at the center of a technology-ready region that strengthens existing IT employers and attracts new ones.

Grounded in employer-identified needs, SIPs provide education and skills training to unemployed and underemployed Marylanders, including those with barriers to employment, as well as to incumbent workers.

The Allegany County coalition’s efforts have paid off, both from the standpoint of economic impact and the valuable technology-related initiatives that it has spawned.

The Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation, which manages EARN Maryland, determined that every state dollar invested creates an additional \$18.97 in economic activity across Maryland.

This return on investment, according to the DLLR report, far surpasses the national average ROI for workforce development programs, which it said is \$3.41.

The economic impact of Allegany County’s IT Center of Excellence easily exceeded the statewide average of EARN-supported initiatives with a return on investment of \$22.58 for each dollar of the grant.

DLLR looked to Salisbury University’s Business Economic and Community Outreach Network for an independent third party evaluation of EARN Maryland’s impact.

To reach its conclusions, BEACON surveyed employers and industry partners to rate the effectiveness of the program and its value to their business.

In 2017, the year covered by the report, the IT Center of Excellence met employer demand by training incumbent workers and students interested in IT careers.

To date, more than 30 students have been placed in internships with employers, and many have been hired as a result of their on-the-job experience.

In addition, training has been delivered to more than 280 incumbent workers in a variety of areas, including certification preparation in computer networking, security and project management.

Employers give the regional partnership high marks for the benefits it has presented to the greater IT community.

“Our partnership in the Western MD IT Center of Excellence has provided us with the technical, security and project management training we need for our employees to grow and for our organization to remain competitive,” said Troy Thomas, director of information services at Orbital ATK.

“A highly educated technical workforce is imperative for future business and job creation in our region. We have also built a tighter partnership between business and educational communities.”

Said Charlotte Clark, human resources partner at IBM, also at Rocket Center, W.Va.:

“Our involvement in the Western Maryland IT Center of Excellence has allowed us to provide training opportunities in cybersecurity and cloud computing to our entry-level service desk workforce, thereby developing a pipeline of qualified talent for higher-level new-collar roles.”

She added: “As the business has expanded, several of these employees have been promoted into cyber and cloud roles. These skills are often in short supply in the external market. Growing the skills through the IT Center of Excellence has been very exciting, given the impact on our business, and the advancement of citizens in our local community.”

The EARN Maryland report to the state legislature also noted the partnership’s annual Tech at the Gap conference, a professional development and networking opportunity intended to showcase Western Maryland as a premier region for tech companies.

The 2017 installment saw 180 tech professionals attend. Plans are under way for this year’s event; Tech at the Gap: Igniting Innovation is slated Wednesday, Oct. 24, at the Rocky Gap Casino Resort.

The IT Center of Excellence has been instrumental in launching and/or supporting such initiatives in IT and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) as the P-Tech (Pathways in Technology Early College High School) program; REACT (K-12 Robotics and Engineering Clubs), the Mountain Maryland Tech Network and Girls Who Code clubs.

“The work of the IT Center has been a game-changer for how our community approaches all things IT and is a model for other industry segments,” county Chamber of Commerce executive director Stu Czapski is quoted in the report.

“With the goal of economic growth in the IT sector for Allegany County,” he added, “the impact of the Western Maryland IT Center of Excellence will be felt for years to come.”

Interested employers and stakeholders should contact Autumn Becker, director of workforce development in ACM’s Center for Continuing Education and Workforce Development, for more information about the IT Center of Excellence.

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