THE SHOALS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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Workforce Readiness Institute

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Career Education for Educators

Overview

Businesses and educators speak different languages and work in very different worlds. They rarely meet and discuss these differences on a practical level. Educators' work in the confines of their classroom or school and focus on the task at hand – meeting the educational standards set at the local, state & federal levels, to move their students from one class or grade to another, culminating in high school graduation. Job well done - task completed. But what can their students DO with what they know? And do they REALLY KNOW it beyond memorization for the test or graduation exam?

The *Workforce Readiness Institute for Educators* (WRI) brings educators and businesses together in small group discussions and industry tours to help educators see for themselves and better understand how their academic subjects relate to and are used in real jobs within the community.

There is a bigger picture and educators need to know that they are a valuable part of it. Businesses NEED them to know what an important part they play in preparing the workforce and therefore the economic development of a community.

Teachers hear it from their students all the time, "Why do I need to know this?" and "When will I *ever* use this again?" Can they give an honest answer? For most, probably not. Especially when it comes to applying academic disciplines to specific jobs and technical skills. Most educators have progressed from high school, to college, interned in a school(s), and now work in a school. Any additional work experience might have taken place in retail or at a financial institution, but rarely in an industrial setting.

WRI helps answer those nagging questions and gives teachers and counselors a much broader view of jobs within the context of their communities and the skills and knowledge needed for the workforce. They will have work-based examples of how the academics and soft skills they teach (responsibility, pride in your work, timeliness, etc.) will be used in real jobs students can relate to – jobs educators may not even know exist in their community.

WRI targets middle and high school math and science teachers and counselors (although others also attend) to help them better understand the levels of math and science and other workplace skills needed in today's industrial workplace.

They tour various businesses and industries to see these skills in use first-hand and talk with employers about their specific workforce needs and the challenges they face with today's workers.

Educators also visit Northwest-Shoals Community College's technical programs to hear from the instructors and students concerning the math and science skills required for the various technical skills represented, as well as the career paths for each skill set, salary possibilities and job opportunities in the region.

Response to the program has been phenomenal! We are very encouraged that educators *want* to know more about how their investment in students relates to the working world outside of the walls of the school. We have found that participants have a new attitude about their own jobs when they find out how important they are to the future livelihood of their students and of the community.

To hear some of the educators' comments about what they have discovered, go to this 7 min. video of their testimonials from the 2008 *Workforce Readiness Institute for Educators* (formerly *Summer Technology Institute*) at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WXLAVJP0AXw

For more information, please contact the Shoals Chamber of Commerce, 256-764-4661 or snewland@shoalschamber.com.

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