

New scholarship aimed at keeping college grads in area

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A program designed to help college students stay in the area after they are educated is going on the road.

The Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership developed its Scholarship Program to provide funds for students who "demonstrate a sincere desire to return to the greater Hazleton area to begin their employment careers," and asks the applicant to sign a contract that the applicant will remain in the Hazleton area for three years.

The committee recently expressed concern that the fact the program exists isn't well known.

So, committee members have offered to speak to civic groups.

Any group interested in hearing more about the program is asked to call Bob Skulsky, executive director of the Civic Partnership, at the Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce at 455-1508.

Jack St. Pierre, chairman of the Partnership's scholarship committee, said the purpose of the program is important, not only to employers looking for workers with specific skills, but also to keeping the area's young people in the area after completing their education.

St. Pierre said it's going to take time for the scholarship program to take root in the local workforce.

"If we offer one scholarship per year, it's going to take a long time for those students to come back and make an impact on the local job market," he said. "The more who could give will help boost the return rate."

He said the job market still has needs potential students can fill.

"Even with all of the industries coming into the area, there are still want ads for maintenance personnel," he said.

Candidates for the Scholarship Program must be pursuing a degree or certification in an accredited one-, two- or four-year program, and must reside within the Hazleton Area or Weatherly Area school districts.

They must be in good academic standing, with a 2.75 or greater grade-point average. They must also demonstrate "employability and the desire to satisfy local employer standards."

Applications will be scored using the following points system: Academic information, 20 points; employment and civic involvement, 15 points; essay, 10 points; and financial need, 5 points.

The deadline for the current round is May 30.

The Partnership cannot guarantee employment, nor will the group serve as a placement agency. But the group will continue to work with local employers in order to provide adequate information on an annual basis as to what types of career openings are available.

If the scholarship winner defaults on either their grades or the employment condition, they would forfeit the scholarship, and then would be obligated to pay it back.

The scholarship winner and applicants may also be eligible for scholarships through the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency, the New Technology Scholarship Program, the GI Bill for New Economy, and SciTech Scholars program. For further information, contact the Partnership at 455-1508 or a high school guidance counselor.

Some potential careers available in

the Hazleton area include the following two-year programs: industrial maintenance technician, manufacturing technology, electronics technology, computer technology and industrial technology. Some typical four-year programs for which there are local job opportunities include computer engineering, manufacturing engineering and production technology.

Typical job functions in these fields would include service, troubleshooting, and repair or sophisticated manufacturing machinery and systems. Installing of manufacturing systems, many of which are computer-operated and overall preventative maintenance. Candidates with strong hands-on mechanical aptitude, and good analytical and problem-solving skills would be ideally suited for these careers.

Earning potential in the Hazleton area for these degrees ranges between \$25,000 and \$70,000 a year, depending upon knowledge and experience level.

The application asks name, address and other personal information. It also asks the applicant's course of study, and what degree it will lead to. It also asks about the applicant's employment and civic involvement history.

Skulsky said PPL has donated \$5,000, and UGI Gas Corp. has donated \$500 to the program. The more sponsors that come forward, the more scholarships the program can award, Skulsky said. In all, PPL has donated \$13,000 to the program.

This past spring, the Partnership awarded its first scholarship to Jason Bellitts of Tresckow, a student in heating, ventilating and air conditioning, at Lehigh-Carbon Community College.