

Greater Hazleton Civic Partnership accepting scholarship applications

By JIM DINO

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Students who will be furthering their education in the fall still have a shot at a local scholarship.

The Greater Hazleton Area Partnership's Scholarship Committee is accepting applications for its scholarship, which is awarded annually to students who are pursuing training or education in a field where local business and industry need employees.

The successful recipient or recipients also have to agree to stay in the area and work for three years after graduation.

Jack St. Pierre, chairman of the scholarship committee, said the whole idea behind the scholarship program was to get young people to stay here and stop the brain drain.

"We are trying to get people to come back to Hazleton to work after graduation," St. Pierre said. "We are trying to fill a need, and at the same time, help some students achieve their goal of pursuing an education. There are a lot of young people who don't want to move, or want to move back. But they've got to find a good job. We are trying to fill a void by giving them the ability to come back and stock the brain drain."

Those eligible for a scholarship must be pursuing a degree or certification in a two- or four-year accredited program of study.

The committee wants to assist students who are pursuing an education in a field in which there are job opportunities available in the Hazleton area.

Some of the typical two-year programs include industrial maintenance technician, manufacturing technology, electronics technology, computer technology and industrial technology.

Typical four-year programs include computer engineering, manufacturing engineering and production technology.

Candidates must reside within the boundaries of the Hazleton Area School District or Weatherly Area School District, must

achieve a minimum 2.75 grade-point average, must demonstrate employability and the desire to satisfy local employer needs.

Skulsky said a recent donation ensures that two scholarships for a total of \$6,000. Each scholarship is for \$3,000 per year.

They will be awarded for the next four years.

Cargill Foods, parent company of the local Excel plant, has donated \$15,000 over the next three years.

"Along with the \$30,000 from the St. Pierre Foundation, we are guaranteed to be able to award two scholarships a year for years," said Bob Skulsky, the partnership's executive director. "We are continuing to raise funds, and are trying to get more companies interested in the program, so we can offer more scholarships."

St. Pierre said career opportunities continue to be available locally.

"There are technical and manufacturing type skills, electrical, technical and maintenance skills, that are needed," St. Pierre said. "A lot of the manufacturing is computer assisted, and someone has to maintain that equipment."

Skulsky, said some students are afraid to apply for the scholarship and then have to leave because they can't find a job.

Skulsky said the student could pay it back if that situation were to arise.

In fact, the Partnership recently made the policy more formal.

But St. Pierre said there are lots of jobs.

"At any time, there are 30 jobs open," St. Pierre said.

"We've channeled out efforts to meeting those needs. We are soliciting applications (for the scholarship) from people pursuing two-year technical programs and heating, ventilating and air conditioning and elevator technology."

For more information on the scholarship program, or to get a 2004 scholarship application, contact Skulsky at 455-1508.