

Scholarship offered to keep students in area

BY JIM DINO (STAFF WRITER)

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JAMIE PESOTINE/Staff Photographer
James Keil, right, works with his instructor Robert Letcher testing lines as part of the Commercial Industrial Maintenance Technology course at McCann School of Business and Technology in Hazleton.



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Students in the Commercial Industrial Maintenance Technology course at McCann School of Business and Technology in Hazleton work on testing lines for conduction during their class on Thursday.

There is a scholarship waiting for students who want to pursue technological or medical training and then work in the Hazleton area.

The Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership is offering \$6,000, to be split equally over two years, to any local student whose education will match a job need in the area.

Anyone in a one-, two- or four-year program is eligible.

One-year programs for which there are jobs available include industrial maintenance technician, manufacturing technology, electronics technology, computer technology and industrial technology.

Two-year programs include computer engineering, manufacturing engineering and production technology. Any four-year program related to those disciplines would also apply.

Typical job functions would include service, troubleshooting and repair of sophisticated manufacturing machinery and systems; installing manufacturing systems, many of which are computer-operated, and overall preventive maintenance.

Last year, the partnership expanded the eligible courses of study to the medical field, because of the shortage of nurses and technical people in the area.

Other jobs on the list are those available at Tobyhanna Army Depot in Monroe County, and criminal justice, which the scholarship committee just added, at the urging of Hazleton Mayor Joe Yannuzzi.

Bob Skulsky, the partnership's executive director and a former depot employee, said there are many opportunities at the facility aside from electronics.

The main reason the scholarship has been offered was to stop the "brain drain" of talented young people who go to school and then leave the area to work and live.

But Dr. John Madden, chairman of the scholarship committee, said there are other reasons.

"There are a number of educational programs around here that would apply, making it easier to meet the requirement. And

there are employment opportunities here," he said.

In recent years, a small number of applications were turned in for the scholarships, and partnership officials felt it was because of the stay-here-to-work requirement.

Madden said partnership officials realize it may be difficult - especially in the current economy - for a student to agree to stay in the area to work if he or she can't find a job. That has happened in the past, and the student was asked to repay the scholarship under reasonable terms.

"If the student cannot find a job locally, it works out to being a loan, with very favorable rates," he said. "If the student makes a sincere attempt to find a job locally, and cannot, they would just pay the loan back, and they would get a reasonable time to do it."

But Madden said there are many career opportunities available in the Hazleton area - some that people don't know about - to meet the criteria for the scholarship.

"All of the technology programs at Penn State, and the four-year degrees in business, IT (information technology), and the new green engineering program" would meet those requirements, he said.

Another is the commercial and industrial maintenance technician program at McCann School of Business and Technology, which prepares the student for an entry-level position in that field.

Bob Marsilio, who designed the program and oversees it for McCann, said students will gain and develop knowledge and skills in the areas of electrical; plumbing; welding; heating, ventilation, air conditioning and refrigeration, and plumbing and the related systems that operate in a commercial or industrial facility. Students also get extensive training in how computers figure into the trades.

Graduates of the program may seek employment in building and office complexes, food-processing plants, manufacturing and other industrial facilities.

"The program is growing," Marsilio said. "There is a definite need. We've had a lot of good feedback from manufacturing facilities in the area. And there is definite interest."

Full-time students earning an average of 16 credit hours per term may complete the program in six or seven consecutive terms, or approximately 18 to 21 months.

Candidates for the scholarship must live within the boundaries of the Hazleton Area and Weatherly Area school districts, or attend MMI Preparatory School in Freeland or Marian High School in Hometown.

Students must maintain a 2.75 or equivalent grade-point average in college to renew the scholarship. If they fall below 2.75, they have one semester to catch up.

Applications are due by May 15, with an anticipated June 1 notification.

Those who apply will have to write an essay on why they should get the scholarship, and list their employment and civic involvement.

Those interested can apply by contacting Skulsky at the Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce at 570-455-1509, or via the Internet at www.hazletonchamber.org or www.civicpartnership.com.

jdino@standardspeaker.com