



It's always good to hear from attendees at events like this one; hoping to gain a better understanding on why they came, what they hope to get out of the event, and why events like this are important for the work they personally do. Some attendees of the Northwest Indiana State of the Workforce Breakfast, hosted by the Northwest Indiana Workforce Board (NWIWB) on April 10th shared their views on the report information and what they hope to achieve with the data.

Those in attendance at the breakfast event were as diverse as the statistics within the report.

Kim Swan is a counselor at Crown Point High School. "I'm here to learn what we can do to help our students prepare for life after high school," she said. "We also have quite a few students who want to work while they are in high school, and we hope to pick up information that will help them be ready." For Swan, learning more about the NWIWB Work Ethic Certificate Program provided some of the answers. She explained that recently several educators from Crown Point High School conducted a brainstorm session on how to help students both in pre and post graduation.

Chicago Faucets, headquartered in Des Plaines, Illinois, has a plant in Michigan City. Melanie Martin, with the company, attended the report release in hopes of learning more about employee retention. "We experienced a very high volume of turnover in 2018 at our Michigan City facility," she said. "I'm hoping to learn how we might get a better handle on hiring the right employee and retaining them."

Linda Woloshansky, President and CEO of the Center for Workforce Innovations (CWI) and producers of the report, touched on that very subject during her remarks. "Access to talent is a primary factor when companies make expansion or site selection decisions," she said. "The acceleration of Northwest Indiana's economy will be driven in large part by the ability to create, retain, and attract a high-quality workforce."

Cynthia Roberts, Dean of the Business School at Indiana University was there with a focus on workforce development. "That's really what we are, workforce developers," she said. "What can we do better? How can we help prepare our students for the workforce needed in Northwest Indiana?"

The top employers continue to be manufacturing (ArcelorMittal, Nipsco, and U.S. Steel), healthcare (Community Hospital, Porter Regional Hospital, Franciscan Health Dyer and Hammond), and entertainment (Horseshoe, Harrah's, Ameristar, Blue Chip).

That translates into education and training needs in healthcare fields, technology and automation, and business management.

The increased numbers of high school graduates in Northwest Indiana was encouraging news to Tim Sanders, Director of Engagement for Purdue Northwest. "The graduation rates in Northwest Indiana are now higher than the rest of the state and the national average," said Shaun Sahlhoff, Planner at CWI. "The NWI work board has placed particular emphasis on high school graduation rates, and we're happy to share with you the news on an increase."

Sanders said that he sees a need for a significant increase in soft skills for those entering the workforce. "I understand that high school curriculums have a CORE 40 obligation, and they should," he said. "But somewhere in that timeframe, before students enter the workforce, we need to find a place and a time to ensure that they have the soft skills needed." Universities such as Purdue and Indiana can provide hard skills in business and healthcare. The soft skills should be attained long before then, according to Sanders.

The Work Ethic Certificate Program provides students the opportunity to learn soft skills such as communication, eye contact, attention to detail, following directions, recognizing problems and finding solutions, being dependable, and showing a strong work ethic to learn are critical.

"The Northwest Indiana workforce is strong and vibrant," Woloshansky concluded. "In order to increase our strength, we need to exercise our ability to add technology and mobility to many of the existing jobs and potential new ones."

That includes talent development initiatives, education initiatives that create hybrid opportunities, and increased regional thinking. The current strengths of Northwest Indiana are the foundation on which to build momentum.