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County's Workforce Renewal Expo draws big crowd

By Jason Evans

LIBERTY – Response to the County's Workforce Expo last month was even greater than organizers had hoped – with students and unemployed workers lining up, eager to go back to school and back to work.

County officials hosted the Expo to introduce county residents interested in taking advantage of the county's Workforce Renewal Program.

"It was exceptionally successful, we feel like," said County Councilwoman Jennifer Willis, estimating that around 500 people came to the Expo.

Under the Workforce Renewal Program, Pickens County is partnering with the school district's Adult Education Center, Tri-County Technical College and Clemson University's FastTrac program to help dropouts go back to school, the unemployed become trained in a new field and budding entrepreneurs get their business ideas off the ground.

Under the program, the county will pay for GED courses and job retraining courses and offer financial incentives for those who enroll in the GED and entrepreneur courses.

During County Council's meeting last week, Councilman Sam Wyche took off his council hat, taking the podium to address council during the public input portion of the meeting.

The interest in the program was so great that organizers had to start the Expo before the planned 12 p.m. start time he said.

"After 7 o'clock, when we shut down, people were still coming," he said.

Wyche said around 150 people signed up during the Expo to go back to school and that 135 people signed up for Tri-County's Quick Jobs retraining program.

"We had expected maybe 200 people total to be there," he said. "We had about 500 people sign up and, of that 500, we had 400 people sign on the dotted line."

Students returning to school could receive as much as \$150 from the county as a reward for reaching certain benchmarks in the program.

In addition, the Adult Education Center will pay for the student's \$80 GED testing fee.

Wyche said more than 60 people signed up to participate in the FastTrac program, which assists people who wish to start a business in finding answers to

job-related questions they may have, such as dealing with payroll or how to withhold taxes on their employees.

“These create jobs,” Wyche said. “If they follow through, and if the business is successful, the majority of them will stay in Pickens County.”

Others signed up for Gateway to College, a program funded by Microsoft founder Bill Gates’ foundation, Wyche said.

“Hopefully some college graduates will come out of that,” he said.

Planning Commissioner Weldon Clark attended the Expo and was pleased with the turnout.

“The people responded,” he said.

If you were unable to attend the Expo, but would like to learn more about the programs available from the WRP, call the following numbers:

For GED information, call the Adult Learning Center at 855-8198.

For job retraining class information, call 646-1700.

For small business class information, call 803-297-9496.