



by Philip Kirschner
President

Report TO MEMBERS

Skills Training a Home Run For NJBIA Member Companies

As president of the nation's largest state-level business association, I am gratified when we can hit a home run for our members. I like it even better when we can repeat our success.

Fortunately, we find ourselves in this position. In July of last year, the New Jersey Business & Industry Association initiated an innovative Basic Skills Workforce Training Program to help small companies tap into employee training resources previously unavailable to them.

The first year was a great success. Between July 2007 and June 2008, more than 3,500 people employed by 226 New Jersey businesses improved their skill levels in basic computer operations, mathematics and measurement, verbal and written communications, and English as a second language.

Thanks to our partnership with the state's county colleges and the NJ Department of Labor and Workforce Development, we're gearing up to repeat that success in 2008 and 2009.

The second year of the training program got underway this summer with a generous Labor Department grant of \$1.33 million. While the state provides the funding, New Jersey's 19 community colleges provide the training, which is coordinated by the NJ County College Consortium.

A key to the success of the training program is that it is available **free of charge** to participating companies, who are not required to complete any complicated paperwork or to make financial disclosures. They can enter one employee into the program or a large group of employees. (Many of the classes are combined so that small numbers of employees from several different companies can participate.) However, employers must pay their employees at their regular hourly rate while in training.

Nothing says more about the success of the program than the comments of participating businesses that in the past could not meet the requirements of the Labor Department's training programs.

Listen to what Simon Kaplan, CEO of Crest Furniture in Dayton, Middlesex County, had to say about one of his warehouse employees who was promoted to the company's computer department after receiving training in English as a second language.

"He had previous computer software experience but could not communicate (that experience). Now with his new language skills, he got the promotion he deserved," Kaplan says.

That comment speaks volumes about the benefits of a program that is giving hundreds of companies a chance to sharpen their employees' work-related skills and thousands of those employees a chance to further their careers. Many of our member companies had positive things to say about this program in its first year.

State Labor Commissioner David Socolow deserves credit for his willingness to create flexible training adapted to the needs of small business. Socolow has been a tireless promoter of the Basic Skills program. He understood its importance in furthering the Governor's goal of strengthening the state economy.

We look forward to continuing our partnership with the Labor Department and the county colleges in the year ahead. If you are an NJBIA member, I encourage you to learn more about the program and to take our online training needs assessment survey. You can find it at www.njbja.org/resources/training. Completing the survey creates no obligation on your part.

If you have questions about the program, you may also contact NJBIA's Christopher Emigholz by calling 609-393-7707, ext. 201, or by sending an e-mail to cemigholz@njbia.org. 📧