Community colleges training baby boomers for new careers:
Why employers should pay attention

By Mary Sue Vickers

The fastest growing segment of the American labor market is the baby boomer – people born between the years 1946 and 1964. These valuable workers are prized for their hard work ethic, can do attitude, high job satisfaction rates, sense of pride in their work, loyalty to their employers and desire to make a difference.

Since 2008, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) has worked through its Plus 50 Initiative to help more than 130 community colleges nationwide provide services and support for baby boomers going to college to train for new careers. And employers should take note.

Plus 50 workers bring employers the value of experience. They tend to be hard-working, punctual and committed to delivering results for their employers. They are ideal employees, and our programs at community colleges in South Carolina and around the country bring their skills up to date and train them for careers.

Two colleges in South Carolina are active in AACC’s Plus 50 Initiative. Tri-County Technical College and Piedmont Technical College are part of the Plus 50 Encore Completion Program, which aims to train 10,000 baby boomers through 100 colleges to earn degrees or certificates in high-demand fields of healthcare, education and social services.

So how do you find baby boomers and recruit them for your company? If you are working in healthcare, education, social services, or another field, talk to the community colleges in your area.

As public institutions committed to serving communities, community colleges want to work with area employers to match job training and certifications to their requirements, and they also want to provide effective education and training programs for people of any age in the community.

When students exit college with the skills and certifications employers need, it’s a win-win. Students get hired, and employers don’t have to expend valuable time and money on retraining employees or engage in costly efforts to recruit qualified workers outside the area.

Tri-County Technical College Focuses on Geriatric Nursing and Is Now Expanding

Tri-County Technical College in Pendleton re-trains plus 50 adults to embark on new careers as geriatric nursing assistants. This project has helped create new purpose for a workforce pool of committed and stable older workers. It also serves a substantial need in the region for more workers to assist caregivers to an aging population.

Local health care facilities are regularly interviewing and hiring directly out of this training program. And the college is working to expand its efforts. The college is moving forward with consideration of using lessons learned into other college programs that appeal to plus 50 adults.

Piedmont Technical College Connects Baby Boomers with Healthcare Training

Piedmont Technical College in Greenwood is also involved with the Plus 50 Encore Completion Program. The college hopes to add more new students over the age of 50 in health science and nursing degree and certificate programs in 2015 as part of its commitment with other campuses throughout the Lakelands region of South Carolina to provide students of all ages a clear path to high-demand careers.

“We are excited to be part of the national effort to share these opportunities with students in this population,” said Janean Reish, Piedmont Tech’s Plus 50 program coordinator. “We offer many paths to a career in health care, and it’s never too late to get started.”

Nancy Turner of Batesburg is in her second semester of Piedmont Technical College’s associate degree in nursing program. In partnership with the American Association of Community Colleges, the college hopes to assist in connecting more students like Turner with rewarding careers in healthcare through the Plus 50 Completion Program.

The Plus 50 program at Piedmont Tech offers participants high quality training in fields such as cardiovascular technology, nursing, pharmacy technology, occupational therapy, surgical technology, veterinary technology and more. These programs generally have good job placement rates, excellent potential for growth in job availability over the next 10 years and provide students with careers that pay.

“We live in a time when the health care industry is booming,” said Ray Brooks, Piedmont Tech president. “And the momentum for growth in these fields is expected to continue. We offer an affordable path into these careers through an education that is adaptable to the needs of each student.”

Piedmont Tech is a good place for students who are looking for an education that works with their schedule. The college offers easy access to facilities and resources, flexible course schedules, long- and short-term programs and a wide range of online and distance learning opportunities.

To share these benefits with baby boomers, Piedmont Tech has taken several steps to increase awareness of these program and their benefits, in line with AACC’s best practices for colleges serving plus 50 adults.

The college began planning for this initiative by forming an advisory committee made up of staff from across the college and representatives from area businesses. In addition, several awareness events have been held to connect with potential participants, including information sessions at each of the college’s seven campuses and a health science careers showcase. The program coordinator and other college staff have also promoted the program through partnerships with area businesses and organizations, as well as through local media outlets.

Their efforts have borne fruit. In the fall of 2014, there were 52 students above the age of 50 enrolled in health-related programs at Piedmont Tech.

“We are planning additional information sessions and workshops to connect with this group of students,” said Reish. “We look forward to growing this population in 2015.”

For information on the Plus 50 program at Piedmont Tech, contact Janean Reish at 864-941-8720 or reish.j@ptc.edu. Information is also available at ptc.edu/plus50.

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