

Decatur Jobs Council focuses on transferable skills

By THERESA CHURCHILL - H&R Senior Writer | Posted: Wednesday, January 6, 2010 4:00 am

DECATUR - Members of the Decatur Jobs Council resolved Tuesday to form a task force to take action on ideas generated during a community brainstorming session Nov. 19 for pulling the Decatur area out of a nationwide recession.

The decision came after representatives of the Chicago Jobs Council presented a report summarizing the forum.

"This is fabulous information, but so what?" said Missy Batman, chairwoman of the council and finance director for the Community Foundation of Decatur/Macon County. "We need to do something with it."

Among the ideas are teaching people transferable skills so their ability to keep a job is less vulnerable to economic change, improving the Decatur area's educational system and building on local economic development efforts to include incentives for small businesses and work force training opportunities.

The report specifically identified the jobs council, the Economic Development Corporation of Decatur and Macon County and the Decatur Area Education Coalition as potential partners in the development of a basic skills training curriculum for job seekers.

Members of the Decatur Jobs Council, a coalition of social service agency representatives working to help disadvantaged people find work, also discussed the possibility of inviting representatives of the West Suburban Jobs Council to Decatur to speak about the advocacy work they are doing.

Consultant Fred Spannaus said a statewide convening of satellite jobs councils at Starved Rock State Park on Nov. 6 illustrated how advanced the DuPage County group is in that area, while Decatur leads in the number of job training programs conducted.

The discussion of the convening included a renewed commitment from Spannaus to look at a job readiness certification system the jobs council could use with clients and also covered the possibility of developing a system for tracking clients across social service agencies.

Susan Franklin, casework supervisor for the Placement Resource Unit of the Danville Correctional Center, suggested that the city's Homeless Management Information System might be used for that purpose.

In other business, President Sue Hemp of Decatur Is Growing Gardeners reported that her organization will pay the \$35 tuition for disadvantaged people to take a basic gardening class beginning in February at Richland Community College in exchange for those people working in one of DIGG's community gardens.

She also said the organization is looking into planting vegetables native to India. "The Indian community in Decatur now has to travel to Bloomington or Chicago to get the veggies to make the dishes they like to make," Hemp said.

In addition, Robyn McCoy, director of Workforce Investment Solutions for Macon and DeWitt counties, said she has yet to hear whether the U.S. Department of Labor will award Decatur a \$2 million to \$4

million Pathways Out of Poverty Grant to train suitable workers for three proposed green energy projects - Secure Energy in Decatur, FutureGen in Mattoon and the Taylorville Energy Center.

The former project would turn coal into synthetic natural gas, and the latter two projects would convert coal into methane for the generation of electricity.

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