

The BeaconNews

Work-force panel to discuss 'skills gap'

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BY BEACON NEWS STAFF

A diverse group of local leaders are joining a panel discussion Friday to address what they are describing as a "crisis" in the local work force.

Even as industry in the Fox Valley finds itself facing increased competition from abroad and spikes in costs for employment and materials, local plant managers say one of their greatest concerns is the lack of skilled workers available to fill payrolls at companies that are using ever more technology.

The resulting "skills gap" is one reason the unemployment rate in the Kane County portion of Aurora was 6.3 percent as of February, the most recent available numbers from the Illinois Department of Employment Security.

By contrast, the Kane County average is 5.5 percent, while the state average is 4.8 percent.

The River Valley Workforce Investment Board is sponsoring the discussion, which is scheduled for 7:30 to 9:30 a.m. at the Prisco Community Center, at Route 31 and Illinois Avenue in Aurora.

The event is free and open to the public.

In addition to a presentation about the challenges and opportunities facing the work force statewide, the event will feature a panel of local politicians, business executives, labor leaders and educators.

Panelists include:

- Aurora Mayor Tom Weisner and Kane County Board Chairman Karen McConnaughay.
- Waubensee Community College President Christine Sobek and East Aurora School Superintendent Jerome Roberts.
- Caterpillar human resources manager Michael V. Groff; Sealmaster Bearings plant manager Felix Martinez; and Kelmscott Press president Joe Stenger; and Painters and Allied Trades Council #30 organizer Gary Von Behren.
- River Valley Workforce Investment Board director Pamela Fettes; Greater Aurora Chamber of Commerce CEO Joe Henning; Aurora Hispanic Chamber of Commerce representative Robert Enriquez; Quad County Urban League director Theodia Gillespie; Hesel House director Ryan Dowd; and Mutual Ground director Linda Healy.

Other sponsors for the program include the Valley Industrial Association, the Aurora Area Jobs Council, the Chicago Jobs Council, the Center on Tax and Budget Accountability, and the Illinois Works for the Future Campaign.