

■ **CWI ON THE WORKFORCE**

Community colleges work to build, educate employees

Economic vitality occurs when business and education work together to carve our future in the global economy. Our leaders at the state and national level on both sides of the aisle agree on one thing: Education is a fundamental necessity for economic stability and social well-being.

This year, President Obama outlined his hope that community colleges would partner with employers to create specialized training for good-paying jobs in high-demand, fast-growing industries such as health care, clean energy and information technology. At the state level, Gov. Butch Otter has often voiced his support of initiatives that create



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partnerships between public education and private business sectors to provide local, skilled employees. In these challenging economic times, government is realizing we need to invest in educating our citizens to compete in today's global marketplace — and why wouldn't we want to keep that talent and investment local?

I am often asked how a

community college can support economic recovery. To me the answer is simple: We help businesses keep a competitive advantage by providing affordable, quality education to keep the local workforce sharp. The competitive landscape of business changes rapidly, and so do their training needs to stay on the cutting-edge of new technology. Community colleges remain flexible and adaptable to the ever-evolving demands of business and industry, and we react quickly with training that drives the economy.

One example that helps to better explain this phenomenon is that of Micron Technology, one of Idaho's largest employers, which

has a continued need for a skilled workforce. Micron hires highly skilled engineers who are often found at the university level, but it also needs hundreds of junior-level technicians who require education levels often met through completion of two-year programs.

A community college provides resources to accommodate the education and training needed at any age and skill level, filling the gap in workforce needs. Last spring, College of Western Idaho students ranging in age from 18 to 63 participated in graduation. In 2010, the college reported more than 90 percent placement of people completing professional-technical programs.

In addition to hiring new employees with the right skills, companies often have a need to update existing employees' skills in new technology with short-term programs. Community colleges' workforce development programs can be customized to facilitate training at a time and place that works for the company. Colleges like CWI form strategic alliances with business and industry in our service areas to create true partnerships for education.

Another important factor often overlooked is that the price tag associated with private and even public colleges has been on an upward trend. Community colleges are a low-cost, high-quality

option for many individuals and businesses to access higher education. Last year more than 40 percent of applicants at CWI were at or below the poverty level. CWI helped students access \$53 million in financial aid. We are helping these students increase the level of education in our community and improve our overall economic outlook.

Community colleges are the primary facilitators of training for tomorrow's professionals. As a community resource, we must work together with the leaders in our service areas. A joint effort between industry and education keeps our community economically strong.

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