

Demand expected to grow for 'middle skill' jobs

Despite the rocky recovery, there continue to be job opportunities in the labor market. Many of these are "middle skill" jobs, which require more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year college degree. The National Skills Coalition called new attention to these jobs last year in its report "Oregon's Forgotten Middle Skills Jobs."



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More than half of the jobs in Oregon are middle skill jobs, and those jobs will continue to grow in the next 10 years. Community colleges, private career schools, apprenticeship programs and community training organizations provide middle skill job training. These jobs pay above average, are expected to be in demand in Lane County, and can be found in almost every occupational area. Here are some specifics:

Health care: Local health care employment is projected to grow by 23 percent from 2008-18. Many of these new jobs will be middle skill jobs, including registered nurses, pharmacy technicians, radiologic technicians, certified nurse aides and medical records clerks.

Manufacturing: Due to the age of the manufacturing work force, many replacement jobs will be opening in the next 10 years. Local manufacturers report that the hardest middle skill jobs to fill are technical positions such as machinists, CNC (computer numerical control) operators, and electronic and mechanical techs.

Construction and utilities: Retirement affects these industries as well, resulting in regular shortages of a high number of skilled trades workers, such as heavy equipment operators, plumbers and linemen.

Green jobs: About 82 percent of green jobs in Oregon require less than a bachelor's degree, according to

a green jobs survey completed by the state Employment Department last year. Specific middle skill green jobs mentioned in the survey include: biological technicians, civil engineering technicians, and forestry and conservation workers.

Service sector: The service sector offers many middle skill jobs, including police and firefighters, legal aid and protective service employees, and accounting clerks.

A recent survey of Lane County youth administered by the Lane Workforce Partnership indicates that many students are unaware of middle skill job opportunities.

Most high schools and their career centers focus on four-year college degrees as a critical measure of success. The reality is that the vast majority of students are not reaching that benchmark. A 2010 Oregon University System Report to the Governor found that only 16 of 100 ninth-graders in Oregon high schools will receive a bachelor's degree by age 25.

Lane Community College is building a new Regional Technical Education Consortium Center — expected to be complete by fall 2011 — that will expose students to middle skills career paths. The center will be dedicated to classes for high school juniors and seniors as well as adult learners exploring middle skill careers in manufacturing, apprenticeship, health care and automotive.

Lane Workforce Partnership promotes middle skill careers through its WorkSource Lane centers and youth programs. Go to www.laneworkforce.org for more information on its Youth Career Awareness Task Force.

If you have questions about training your work force, contact Robin Onaclea Scott, business service coordinator at Lane Workforce Partnership, at robino@laneworkforce.org or (541) 682-7224.