



Section Summary

In general, the region's workforce is positioned to meet the needs of lower to semi-skilled occupations in a mostly white collar work setting. In recent years, with the development of the Tradeport Business Park in Midway, a warehouse/distribution cluster has started to develop that has attracted large regional and national retail operators. This has created a demand for people with experience in modern automated distribution centers. The regional presence of more technically-oriented production or knowledge-based industries is modest, but the region desires to diversify its economy and labor force to support these higher-level employers. Currently, the region's education, workforce, and training programs are preparing workers that have basic skill levels, but lack technical proficiency or advanced degrees.

The partial exception to this rule involves retired Fort Stewart personnel still living in the region. This workforce is highly coveted and in demand by many employers who are seeking capable and reliable workers. The region's success in attracting different industry will depend in part on its ability to produce larger numbers of workers with strong fundamental work skills, reliability and the capacity to learn complex tasks. The working relationship between local technical colleges and industry leaders is variable depending on the employer, but can be improved to be more responsive to changing industry needs, as well as emerging employment opportunities.

Recommendations for enhancing the regional workforce include:

- Ensuring the workforce has the basic skills necessary for obtaining and holding local industry jobs,
- Increasing marketing of technical training programs and certificates to industry leaders,
- Strengthening the diversity and availability of education programs in the region,
- Increasing job recruitment opportunities and job training opportunities for military spouses and dependents, and
- Maintaining communication with local industries and continuing to meet their needs.

These recommendations, including specific action items, can be found in the following Recommendations Section.

Assessment Analysis Findings

Issues

As the population of Fort Stewart continues to grow in the future, it is likely that many dependents of the new personnel will have a need to seek employment. The same is true for the region's civilian population. Having employment training programs and career enhancement opportunities, as well as understanding the needs of local area employers is pivotal in preparing for this increase in demand.



Interviews with industry representatives indicate that the retired military have basic work skills often lacking in the rest of the workforce and they actively try and recruit this segment of the population.

Basic Skills of Labor Force

Multiple interviews with technical college representatives and industry leaders alike have indicated that many in the civilian workforce should improve basic work skills and work ethic to maintain competitiveness in the workplace. Basic work skills such as daily attendance and arriving on-time have been noted as problems by both employers and technical colleges. To address this problem, there is a work ethic component in all of the technical college courses. However, there may need to be more focused attention at earlier ages, such as middle school or high schools.

On the other hand, employers indicate that the military retiree workforce is considered very desirable by many local employers. The time spent in the military produces workers that follow direction; have an attention to detail; value commitment; and possess a strong work ethic. Interviews with industry representatives indicate that the retired military have basic work skills often lacking in the rest of the workforce and they actively try and recruit this segment of the population.

However, currently there is no mechanism outside of Fort Stewart to target military retirees or to assess their skills sets for the private employment market.

Teacher Recruitment

The technical colleges have noted that there are some programs where it is difficult to recruit teachers. If an adequate teacher is not found, the program could be dropped from the offerings. It can be difficult to find teachers for the more highly technical training programs, such as machine tooling, because there is not a large pool of local people with the skills and experience to teach the class to choose from. Therefore, it is often necessary to recruit teachers from outside the area and the positions are not always able to be filled.

Meeting Industry Needs

The technical colleges have economic development outreach departments that coordinate and communicate directly with regional industries. However, it has been mentioned that the technical colleges and programs have not always meet the “on-the-ground” needs of local industries in an effective manner. Discussions with industry leaders have mentioned that in the past it was sometimes difficult maintaining communication with the economic department liaisons.

It should be noted that industry leaders have stated that the technical colleges have recently become much more communicative and effective at meeting specific training needs of their companies. Some of the more recent and successfully utilized programs offered by the technical colleges include free on-site retraining of technical positions (such as fork-lift operators), offering free management and supervisor courses, and partnering with companies on certification programs. As a whole, industry leaders have mentioned having a currently very positive and effective relationship with the technical colleges.

The Department of Labor has received mixed reviews from industry leaders. While some have successfully utilized the GeorgiaWork\$ and other job recruitment programs, others have mentioned that the Department of Labor has not maintained communication or site visits with their companies. It will be imperative for the Department of Labor to maintain communication with all local industries in order to strengthen the growing workforce of the area.

Technical Training Program Marketing

Some industry employers we spoke with do not realize that there are some programs offered at the technical colleges that may be beneficial to their companies. Also, some industry leaders did not believe that certain new programs, such as the Warehouse Certificate program, were marketed very well to the unemployed workforce. Although the technical colleges market programs through newspapers, radio, and billboards, it may be necessary to create a more strategic marketing effort to specifically target those who would be likely to enroll in the training programs.



A more focused marketing strategy to area industries may also be beneficial. Examples of target marketing include identifying potential company prospects on a quarterly basis and direct mailing information on training programs and ways the colleges can help train and recruit workers. Follow-up calls and contacts will be necessary in order to make sure local industries are aware of the programs and opportunities available to their companies.

Job Fairs

The Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP) offers job fairs that are usually held twice a year (during non-deployment years). The target audience of the job fairs is transitioning soldiers, who have finished their enlistment term. However, dependents of military personnel are welcome to attend. There are typically 75 to 100 businesses that attend, and companies in attendance run the gamut from retailers like Walmart, to banks, military contractors and state and federal agencies.

Interviews with ACAP representatives indicate that it becomes difficult to hold job fairs during deployment periods. In fact, the last job fair was held in 2008. The next job fair will likely be held in spring or summer of 2011, when the troops are due back from deployment.

Although there is a Family Employment Readiness program offered by Fort Stewart, there is not a job fair held specifically for military spouses. Such a job fair would be an asset that military spouses can utilize once they have moved to the Fort Stewart area. Similar to the welcoming events, it is recommended that job fairs, which would be open to the general public but held at Fort Stewart, be staggered over time in order to reach all of the rounds of relocated spouses. Before holding such an event, it would be necessary to identify and target specific employers, for example hospitals, education facilities, and child care facilities.



Creation of Military Spouse Employment Programs

Army Community Services at Fort Stewart offer the Family Employment Readiness services. These services are similar to those found at the Georgia Department of Labor Career Centers and include career coaching, job search assistance, access to computers, and free classes and workshops. However, it may be possible to create other programs and training opportunities targeted specifically to military spouses.

The Fort Stewart public entities, schools, and Workforce Investment Board may want to consider partnering to create a “Military Spouse Training Grant,” similar to what another military community in Fort Lee, Virginia has started offering. This grant was funded by a partnership between the regional Planning District Commission, the local community colleges, and the Virginia Workforce Network. Unlike the other training programs, the Military Spouse Training Grant primarily targets spouses of military personnel, particularly entry-level military spouses that are unemployed or under-employed. The “Work Skills 101” and Career Readiness Certificate are the two main programs funded under this grant (described in more detail below). There are no qualifiers or income restrictions and the programs are open to all military spouses who are US citizens or have the right to work. In addition to training and employment assistance, the \$200,000 grant also provides free child-care and transportation services to military spouses so they can more easily access the training classes.

- **“Work Skills 101”**
“Work Skills 101” is a 2-week training program that teaches participants basic job skills such as interview preparation, resume writing, and PC basics such as Microsoft Word, Excel, Internet and e-mail. Each 2-week training session can accommodate a maximum of twenty students and all classes are held at the local community college. As of report writing, enrollment has averaged twelve students per class.
- **Career Readiness Certificate (CRC)**
As mentioned previously, the Career Readiness Certificate is a nationally recognized certificate that is obtained by passing the WorkReady examination. Once the certificate is received, the military spouse can use it as an attachment to their resume to show employers that they are proficient in basic job skills. To prepare and study for the WorkReady test, the Military Spouse Training Grant provides funding for the distribution of WorkReady on-line and print curriculum material. The on-line curriculum is available to the military spouse for one-year. Those entering the “Work Skills 101” course are automatically given the WorkReady curriculum to help the participant study for the WorkReady test if they should desire to take it.

Recommendations

Introduction

The following recommendations reflect the issues as discussed above. They are arranged into short and long-term strategies.

Short Term Action Items

Awareness of Technical Training Programs

Some industry employers we spoke with do not realize that there are some programs offered at the technical colleges that may be beneficial to their companies.

- Action 1** Create marketing strategy targeting local industries
- Action 2** Identify potential company prospects on a quarterly basis
- Action 3** Direct mail marketing material on training programs and ways the colleges can help train and recruit workers
- Action 4** Follow-up calls and contact with local industries to ensure awareness of programs and opportunities

Meeting Industry Needs

The technical colleges and Georgia Department of Labor conduct economic development outreach and coordinate and communicate directly with regional industries. It is imperative that communication is maintained between local industries, technical colleges, and the GA Department of Labor.

- Action 1** Routinely meet with industry leaders
- Action 2** Follow-up calls with local industries to keep abreast of their changing needs

Military spouse and Dependent Job Opportunities

The Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP) offers job fairs that are usually held twice a year (during non-deployment years). The target audience of the job fairs is transitioning soldiers, who have finished their enlistment term. Dependents of military personnel are welcome to attend. However, there is not a job fair held specifically for military spouses. In addition, Family Employment Readiness Services offer career coaching, job search assistance, etc. However, it may be possible to create other programs and training opportunities targeted to military spouses.

- Action 1** Create job fairs targeted to military spouses and dependents
- Action 2** Create “Work Skills 101” program. This is a two-week program that teaches participants basic job skills, such as interview preparation, resume writing, and PC basics such as Microsoft Word, Excel, Internet and e-mail
- Action 3** Assistance with helping dependents and spouses obtain a Career Readiness Certificate (CRC). Once the certificate is received, the military spouse can use it as an attachment to their resume to show employers that they are proficient in basic job skills.

Economic Diversification

Economic diversification is needed throughout the four-county Fort Stewart region to ensure adequate military spouse employment opportunities and to maintain quality of life. Long and Tattnall Counties have attracted military and non-military families from Fort Stewart because of relatively lower cost of living and small town character. However, these two counties need commercial and industrial

Our goal is that the study area shares in an integrated balance of sustainable economic development initiatives to complete a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), which will serve as the guidance for business recruitment and the source of additional grants and funding opportunities.



diversification in order to grow the tax base to support the additional residents, as well as provide job opportunities for spouses and family members of Fort Stewart personnel.

The updates to the economic diversification studies in Bryan and Liberty Counties, along with the completion of diversification studies in Long and Tattnall Counties will support the implementation of development strategies that leverage existing regional economic resources and help attract compatible and diverse businesses to invest in local communities. Our goal is that the study area shares in an integrated balance of sustainable economic development initiatives to complete a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), which will serve as the guidance for business recruitment and the source of additional grants and funding opportunities. The Partnership staff will work to support the task through local coordination efforts among stakeholders and elected officials in the counties.

In addition to conducting studies, the communities should promote alternate tax-producing land uses to lessen dependence on local property taxes. The lack of retail and commercial uses in Long County and a tax base with limited diversity is making it increasingly difficult for this county to provide services to the growing population. Counties have had to raise taxes in the recent past in order to accommodate the growth. Having a more diverse tax base, which includes retail development, would help offset the increasing cost of providing public services.

Action 1 Provide incentives for commercial and/or industrial-based companies to locate in the region.

Action 2 Align educational programs with skills of local workforce and needs of regional employers.

Action 3 Update or conduct economic diversification studies in Bryan, Liberty, Long and Tattnall Counties

Long Term Action Items

Advanced Degree Educational Opportunities

Currently, the region's education, workforce, and training programs are preparing workers that have basic skill levels, but lack technical proficiency or advanced degrees. The immediate Fort Stewart region is not well served by colleges and universities offering four-year baccalaureate degrees or post graduate and doctoral degrees. Most of the higher level college institutions are located just outside of

the Fort Stewart Region in Savannah. In addition, the State of Georgia's major four-year institutions (i.e., University of Georgia, Georgia Tech, Georgia Southern, etc.) do not have a major presence within the region and do not offer distance learning opportunities through local technical colleges.

Action 1 Research and coordinate efforts on the potential of creating a distance-learning programs with Georgia's major four-year institutions

Basic Skills of Labor Force

Multiple interviews with technical college representatives and industry leaders alike have indicated that many in the civilian workforce do not have basic work skills or a strong work ethic. Basic work skills such as daily attendance and arriving on-time have been noted as problems by both employers and technical colleges. To address this problem, there is a work ethics component in all of the technical college courses. However, there may need to be more focused attention at earlier ages such as middle school or high schools.

Action 1 Incorporate work ethic classes into middle and high school curriculum

Action 2 Create a new "career academy" high school (partnership of public high schools and technical colleges)