

news & notes from the region

leaders that serves as the oversight and policy-making body for federally funded employment and training services in the region.

It also has the broader role of addressing critical labor market issues and developing strategic partnerships with local leaders in economic development, the K-12 and higher education system, government agencies, chambers of commerce, community-based groups and labor organizations.

The board's staff worked with Interprint to create a format with three basic steps, according to Heather Williams, youth director at MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board.

The first step was to invite area high school students to take a tour of Interprint last October.

"We worked with high school career guidance staff to contact and invite students who would be interested," said Williams.

The 48 students who attended met employees and toured operations in departments such as engraving, laminating, production, finishing and the lab. There was also a Q&A session with current staff who had gotten jobs with the company right out of high school.

"A focus was on students who would be graduating and in the workforce in the near future," said Williams.

The second stage took place on Feb. 19 with an Interprint Tech Session for 12 regional teachers and guidance counselors during the school vacation week.

The educators, who were paid a stipend, spent a day at Interprint learning about how the work gets done and what drives the world of decor printing. Participants toured all departments within the company and learned about its history, products, design trends, printing technologies, and current and future workforce needs and career opportunities.

In addition, participants took part in hands-on activities such as a "draw down," which is a test to match the ink color for printing.

Following the conclusion of the session, participants are now developing projects and lessons to relay this information to their students, and explain the opportunities that are available for employment with Interprint.

Part three of this partnership is currently in the works and involves opportunities for Interprint to provide simulation-type training for the printer positions it is looking to fill.

This training would involve equipment at Interprint that replicates printing processes, which would introduce and instruct students in those processes. The details and timetable for this phase are still being explored.

Once the program is built internally, the

company is hopeful to eventually provide training externally to students. There is also discussion about creating co-op opportunities for local high school students so they can see the opportunities available at a local employer before graduating high school and attending college.

Williams said that the Interprint initiative draws on several programs that the MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board already offers on an ongoing basis for employers.

It receives annual funding from the state Department for Elementary and Secondary Education for career readiness programs in the schools. This includes funding for programs related to career education from grades K-12, student tours, stipends for educator externships, and Williams' position.

"What's unique about the Interprint program is that we combined several approaches to create the three-stage model," Williams said. "We hope to do that with other sectors and employers in the future."

She added that companies interested in being part of career readiness opportunities can contact her at the MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board at 413-442-7177 ext. 151. ♦

MassHire collaborates with Interprint on job challenge

BY JOHN TOWNES

Interprint Inc. has a large need for printer technicians that encompasses on-the-job-training and career pathway opportunities.

However, the Pittsfield-based company was having a difficult time filling these positions, and turned to the MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board for assistance. This led to a unique collaborative initiative to get the word out about job opportunities at the company.

Interprint is a global design and printing company that produces decorative surfaces for wood-based panels that are processed into furniture and flooring, and used for interior finishing.

"The dedicated staff at the MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board has helped us raise awareness that skilled trade positions in the printing industry exist in the Berkshires," said Melissa O'Brien, Interprint's human resources generalist, who is leading these efforts for the company.

The MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board is composed of business and community