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LOCAL BUSINESS LEADERS, EDUCATORS, MEET WITH COUNTY EXECUTIVE TO DISCUSS FUTURE OF IT JOBS

ST. CHARLES COUNTY, MO— St. Charles County Executive Steve Ehlmann is concerned about the current and future supply of qualified information technology workers. And he’s not the only one.

At a recent IT and Business Leaders Luncheon hosted by Ehlmann, local information technology professionals and educators from the K-12 systems, colleges and universities met to address the need for more focused training to meet the growing need of qualified applicants for high-wage IT positions. Forging new partnerships between business leaders and educators is another step in the right direction, and the goal of Ehlmann’s luncheon.

“It is clear we need a ‘cultural shift’ in making technology a core skill taught from childhood through adulthood as we prepare the next generation of problem-solvers and innovators to compete in the global economy,” Ehlmann said. “Some of the best wage rates – from entry level to management – are earned by dedicated and well-trained workers in the growing information technology sector. Employers are telling us too many of their IT jobs are going unfilled from the local pool of graduates and the general populations in St. Charles County and metro St. Louis.”



Participating in the IT and Business Leaders Luncheon are, from left, Rex McKanry, assistant professor and chair, department of Computer Science, St. Charles Community College; Tom Cupples, director of Graduate and Undergraduate IT Programs, Lindenwood University; and Dr. Stephen Blythe, associate professor, department of Computer Science, Lindenwood University.

This presents an opportunity to recruit more new people into the region based on employment opportunities, Ehlmann told the group, but also raises a concern that there is a disconnect between what local students are pursuing and the types of excellent career pathways available in information technology.

(MORE)

FUTURE OF IT JOBS, pg. 2

Citing wage data for the St. Louis metropolitan statistical area (MSA), Ehlmann said the annual median income for computer programmers for 2015 was \$83,900. For database administrators, the average salary was \$89,020; for software developers (applications), \$93,970; and for software developers (systems), \$103,820.

The group discussed the need to emphasize more “brain sports” (coding, robotics, and science competitions) in our schools, better align technical training and college degrees with the current IT trends, and emphasize soft skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication and effective team work.

Ideas from educators on how to better integrate business and education include:

- More business leader advisory panels that oversee curriculum development and student project assessments
- Increased business leader involvement with work-study programs, business sponsorships and scholarships
- Growth of the business mentor program
- More effective legislative lobbying efforts in Jefferson City

“Whether we are talking about IT jobs or those in healthcare, financial services, transportation or the skilled trades, our community and region needs more students and adults to pursue the appropriate training and credentials in order to keep our local economy strong and growing,” Ehlmann said. “It is going to take new thinking and changes that parents, school boards, educators, guidance counselors, business leaders and legislators will need to continue grappling with together.”

Businesses represented at the luncheon included BoardPaaS, Charter Communications, Client Services, Curas, Enterprise Holdings, E-Trailer, Flat World Supply Chain, jWeb New Media, NISC, Red 8 Interactive, Serco, The SOHO Shop and Ungerboeck Software International.

Participating from the education sector were all public school superintendents in St. Charles County; public and private K-12 school principals and teachers; President Dr. Michael Shonrock and deans, department heads and professors from Lindenwood University; St. Charles Community College; Ranken Technical College – Wentzville; Lewis & Clark Career Center; LaunchCode; and the Midwest Cyber Center of Excellence. Other attendees included staff from the Economic Development Center of St. Charles County (EDC), the Greater St. Charles Chamber of Commerce and the O’Fallon Chamber of Commerce & Industry.

Further discussions, focus groups, surveys and special events on these issues are planned. For more information about the local workforce and economy, contact the St. Charles County Department of Workforce & Business Development at 636-255-6060.

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