

Hospitality Job Training and Partnerships Aiding Crisfield Businesses & Residents

Job training programs sponsored by Somerset County in cooperation with the J.M. Tawes Technical and Career Center and by the Greater Crisfield Action Coalition (GCAC) in conjunction with Wor-Wic Community College are preparing residents for employment, improving workers' skills, and laying the groundwork for businesses to grow. Four separate initiatives, including three training classes and one Industry Partnership, have been underway over the past weeks and will continue through May and beyond in an effort to offer residents and tourists alike a positive and memorable experience in the Crisfield area. These efforts correspond with Crisfield's Five Year Action Plan and the vision for Crisfield to be the number one *unique tourist destination* on the Eastern Shore.

At public meetings held last November and January, GCAC announced its White Boot Hospitality™ workforce development program aimed at helping residents find jobs, providing a more consistent level of service for visitors to the area, and spurring business growth. That program envisioned a series of credentials that a worker could attain and "stack" as he or she built out their resume. White Boot Hospitality™ (WBH) is a trademark that GCAC will use to recognize workers and job seekers who complete a specified set of classes related to the hospitality industry. Businesses that hire these workers and subscribe to White Boot Hospitality™ principles may become White Boot Hospitality™ recognized. Keith Campbell, GCAC's Workforce Development Director, says, "White Boot Hospitality is a takeoff on white glove service, but with an Eastern Shore flare. When visitors come to the Crisfield area, we want them to know that they are in Crisfield by the quality and uniqueness of the service they receive in restaurants, motels, retail, and other establishments. This will result in visitors coming back to Crisfield and also sharing their positive experiences with their friends when they return home."

One of the credentials that GCAC had identified as part of the WBH stack was the food safety credential ServSafe® issued by the National Restaurant Association. Earlier this year, Somerset County announced that they would be sponsoring ServSafe® for county residents at the Tawes Center, paid for from Hurricane Sandy job training funds. Fitting exactly with GCAC's plans, the group set about recruiting existing restaurant and club workers from the Crisfield area to participate in these classes. Thus, the ServSafe® program became the first training program identified by GCAC and provided by the county, which aligned with the workforce development goals in the Action Plan.

At the same time, GCAC began recruiting restaurant owners to participate in the Crisfield Area Hospitality Industry Partnership, a second workforce initiative from the Crisfield Action Plan. Industry Partnerships (IPs) are a means of developing and growing businesses through collaboration of groups with similar needs. IPs are recognized and used across the country in areas such as healthcare, manufacturing, construction, and hospitality. GCAC intends to sponsor additional IPs as its economic development projects move ahead. As restaurant owners

became involved in the IP, they expressed a need for alcohol service certification for their employees. GCAC passed this need on to Conal Turner at the Tawes Center, and within a matter of weeks, Somerset County responded by sponsoring a TAM class (Techniques of Alcohol Management) to be held at the Crisfield American Legion on April 25th. This class became the third initiative related to training and offered by Somerset County. Mr. Turner recently commented, "Working closely with the needs of our communities is a prime goal which we take very seriously at the J. Millard Tawes Technology and Career Center. We seek to provide specific and centralized training that will meet the needs of individuals and these local communities."

As these plans were developing, GCAC's Workforce Development Director reached out to colleagues at the United States Department of Labor (USDOL) who helped establish appropriate contacts at the National Restaurant Association (NRA) and the MD Department of Labor Licensing and Regulation (DLLR). Upon learning of GCAC's plans, DLLR offered that funding might be available from an existing EARN grant at Wor-Wic Community College in Salisbury. This funding has been made available and is being used to develop customized hospitality classes that will be offered beginning in May of this year in Crisfield. This is the fourth initiative underway that aligns with the hospitality training needs in the Crisfield Action Plan.

Michele DiLillo, NRA Vice-President for Academics in NRA's Chicago office, visited the Crisfield area last week to express support for these efforts and provided the group with additional advice and resources. These classes will be held in five, four hour sessions at the Crisfield Elks Lodge. Chef Bonnie Aronson will be the primary instructor. One session will include a hands-on experience and lunch at an Ocean City hotel, and in another session, Crisfield Mayor Kim Lawson will provide students with some historical background on the Crisfield area. The content of these classes is being defined by the newly formed Crisfield Hospitality Industry Partnership. Membership in this partnership is free and open to any business in the greater Crisfield area that interacts with the public and is willing to participate in achieving the group's objectives. Eligible businesses include restaurants, motels, retail shops, service establishments, and private clubs that open to the public. The Greater Crisfield area is defined as any area accessible from Route 413.

The Crisfield Hospitality Industry Partnership is being led by Kathy Berezosky, co-owner of Watermen's Inn with assistance from Mary Nelson, owner of Water's Edge Café. GCAC director Paul Register is providing coaching and support to the group, along with Workforce Development Director Campbell. Paul, Kathy, and Mary have nearly 100 years of combined professional hospitality and customer service experience. In a recent discussion, Paul commented, "Sometimes workers overlook the potential of a career in the hospitality industry." Kathy added, "Both my employees and my business are enhanced by these continuing education opportunities". Mary observed, "My employees who completed the ServSafe class have enhanced their knowledge base, and I see that they now require less supervision than before the class. They are looking forward to completing additional WBH classes".

Students who complete the classes that are part of the WBH program will receive certificates that will serve as “industry recognized credentials” that may be used to build a high-value resume. Individual classes are expected to be approximately 15 hours in length. It is expected that most GCAC-specific classes will be taught in the Crisfield area and that transportation to required classes at other locations can be provided. Classes developed by Wor-Wic will be designed to accommodate the possibility of eventual conversion of certificates to college credit. This ‘articulation’ of continuing education to college credit is a goal of recent Federal initiatives and is considered a best-practice in workforce development.

In cooperation with Wor-Wic , Crisfield workers also have begun attending a series of classes in Ocean City entitled Hospitality Boot Camp for Frontline Workers. If sufficient demand develops, this program may also be brought to Crisfield.

Any business or club owner/manager who wishes to join the Crisfield Hospitality Industry Partnership is asked to attend a meeting on Monday May 25th at 10:00 AM at the Crisfield Elks Lodge where GCAC and Wor-Wic representatives will discuss upcoming training. Any who cannot attend should contact Kathy Berezosky at Watermen's Inn or Paul Register by phone at 813-842-0978 or by email at Pregester@hotmail.com. Membership is free to those who are willing to participate in advancing the vision of the Crisfield area becoming the most unique tourist destination on the Eastern Shore. Employees of partnership members may participate in any of the available classes at no charge. Partnership members will be responsible for overseeing the content of additional classes as they are developed.

Classes for unemployed workers who register with GCAC will also be free for those who meet basic entry requirements. At the same time, GCAC is seeking employers, both in the Crisfield and Ocean City areas, who may wish to hire individuals who have received some basic training. In addition, daily transportation to and from Ocean City is also being explored to create more job opportunities. All of these efforts are designed to help people through training that connects to jobs, particularly related to tourism, the largest industry in the world.