



Mayor's column July 24, 2014

Education and Jobs

Recently the City of Gallatin, in conjunction with the Nashville Chamber of Commerce, hosted a meeting for more than 40 community leaders to discuss issues that impact us all.

As many of you know the middle Tennessee area is booming. It is forecasted that the middle Tennessee area will grow by one million people in the next 20 years. Because of the economic boom we are experiencing, many companies are choosing to locate in our area – creating more jobs for our citizens. Many of these companies that are coming are looking for a skilled and trained workforce to fill these positions.

If all things would stay constant, per the Nashville Chamber's findings, we could have a shortage of 35,000 workers by the year 2021. However, the community leaders in this meeting have no intention of letting things remain as they are. Del Phillips, our Sumner County School Superintendent, spoke about several initiatives that the school system is already undertaking to expand opportunities for students to pursue postsecondary training. He talked about the new Middle College starting this year to help students complete high school and have two years of college. Students are identified by the school system for admission to the Middle College. This innovative approach to education is being headed up by Betsy Hunter and Brad Schreiner who are the same team that started Merrol Hyde Magnet School. Dr. Phillips stated that this fall there was room for 50 students.

The high schools are also doing ACT prep classes to help students prepare for admission tests to institutions of higher learning. The high schools offer dual enrollment classes for students who want to take some college courses while they are enrolled in high school. Next year, fall of 2015, there is a new vocational school to open in Portland offering students the opportunity to learn a trade or skill. It is projected that there will be a shortage of skilled workers in several areas of employment.

Dr. Jerry Faulkner of Volunteer State Community College spoke of the Governor's initiative to offer postsecondary education at the community colleges with no tuition or fees. Dr. Charles Lea at Union University also spoke of the colleges outreach to help students get additional education. This fall, VSCC will be hosting a career Fair to expose students to the tuition assistance that is available to students to further their education or training.

With all of this outreach and assistance available to students, what would keep a student from applying? One of the most important aspects of whether a young person chooses to further their education is the encouragement of their parents. Parents are the single most motivating factor in the lives of young people. As the first-generation college-educated person in my family, I know full well the influence of a parent. It is important to reach out to our parents and let them know what skills their child is going to be required to have in order to secure gainful employment. Parents want the best for their children. Parents as well as students need to know about the tuition assistance that is available.

What about the students that don't have a strong parental influence? Dr. Phillips spoke about the need for more guidance counselors in our schools. Today in high school, each guidance counselor is responsible for approximately 400 students. That ratio needs to be reduced in the future in order for the counselors to have more time to work with students and help them pursue the postsecondary skills they are going to need to meet a changing job market.

Middle Tennessee and Gallatin are enjoying an increasingly robust economy. All of us must become engaged in the discussion of encouraging our young people to pursue additional skills. When you are in the coffee shop or at your civic club or at work, start a discussion about the changing needs of the job market. Your involvement might just make the difference in a young person's choice as to what to do with their future.