

Spencer Industries Project – A workplace education project in partnership with the North Spencer Alternative Education Center and Adult Education Works in Indiana Workforce Education Project.

The North Spencer Alternative Education Center in Dale, the comprehensive adult education program for Spencer and Perry counties, has hit the ground running on workforce literacy, according to adult education director Rob Moore.

“Spencer County’s adult literacy level and educational attainment level rank among the lowest in Indiana,” reminded Tom Utter, executive director of the Lincolnland Economic Development Corporation. “Spencer County’s demand for a workforce with high technical skills is growing as our new and traditional companies acquire higher technologies in order to compete globally. The North Spencer School Corporation’s Workforce Literacy Project is meeting the needs of companies and workers by reaching into the workplace with a multi-phased education process customized to each situation. Participating companies are comfortable with the presence of Mr. Moore and his instructors. The employees are achieving measurable increases in knowledge and better productivity. In today’s competitive business climate we could not ask for a more significant program.”

North Spencer has initiated workforce literacy training for employees of Spencer Industries, located in Dale. Spencer Industries is one of the most versatile and diversified thermoforming companies in the world. The company makes canopies for tanning beds, body panels for All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs), components for commercial and residential refrigerators, grilles and door panels for refrigerated transportation trailers, air ducts for the Air Force's F-22 fighter aircrafts, along with a variety of other thermoformed parts.

Amanda Miller was selected from Heritage Hills High School as the instructor; she formerly worked in assisting students to prepare for the Graduation Qualifying Exam.

"Amanda was the right person for this position," Moore commented. "She has experience assessing people's skills and developing individualized curriculum and instruction to address their needs."

Hiring the teacher was actually the last step in reaching a training agreement with Spencer Industries. The first step involved visits with several companies in North Spencer's comprehensive district, namely Spencer Industries, Winkler's (a wholesale distribution company), and Automated Routing (a small wood manufacturing company). Moore met with the president, human resources officer, and/or training coordinator of each company. Tom Utter and Adult Education Works consultant, Mike Cockrum, accompanied him. So far, only Spencer Industries has agreed to conduct the training, although Winkler's is not far behind.

"The key for us to reaching the training agreement with Spencer Industries was offering to do the initial assessments with the TABE (Tests of Adult Basic Education)," Moore said. "I went in several times over the period of about three weeks and assessed the employees at no obligation to the company. Then I gave the company some data on how many employees scored at each functioning level, and I disaggregated the data by age, job title, shift, and length of service. I then told them what we could do to raise their employees' skills."

In the first phase of the project at Spencer Industries, Miller works with one or two employees at a time on growing the participants' workplace reading, writing, and math skills. Each employee is given 1 1/2 hour training sessions twice per week during their paid time. The training is held from 4:30 a.m. – 8:30 a.m. and again from 4:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays. Miller started the first week with some general workplace literacy instruction print materials. During the second week, she acquired a mobile laptop computer lab purchased by the North Spencer

County School Corporation for this project. The mobile lab is a wireless network with one laptop functioning as a server. Employee participants use the KeyTrain program that is loaded on the lab as part of their training. Miller developed instructional materials that were specific to Spencer Industries. Miller stated: "I think this program is a great opportunity to bring education back to the workforce. Everyone involved stands to gain from this great experience."

The project also has an advisory committee made up of the production manager, plant supervisor, training supervisor and a program participant of Spencer Industries, Moore, Miller, Utter, and Cockrum. The purpose of the advisory committee is to share observations about the project from the perspectives of the company and training provider and contribute to the assessment of the project's effectiveness.

"In today's manufacturing environment training is a perpetual necessity, especially in higher, more technical positions", commented Jarid Hirt, production manager at Spencer Industries. "Based on technical needs at Spencer, we are pleased to be piloting the workplace education project in our CNC and Quality Departments."

Plans for future phases of the project are in the works that will involve incorporating Certificates of Technical Achievement (CTAs) into Spencer Industries' existing training program in those job-specific skills involved in the manufacturing sector. In addition, training will be available to Spencer Industries employees at Heritage Hills High School's advanced manufacturing lab.

Moore complimented the Adult Education Works in Indiana Workforce Education Project staff for their encouragement and equipping him with the skills necessary to launch this project. "Mike Cockrum really knows the business world inside and out and helped me develop the business vocabulary I needed to communicate effectively with people in industry."

Jim Edwards, a Santa Claus resident and chairman of the Indiana Chamber's Workforce Development Committee, echoed Utter's compliments. "The workforce literacy project in Spencer County is one of the vital cornerstones of 'Project Excellence,' an initiative which will result in significantly 'raising the bar' in education, workforce development, and economic development in the county. The benefits of this project will pay dividends to the county for years to come. These benefits will be derived from significantly increasing workforce skills. This will greatly impact the ability to retain industries and to attract new industries as these opportunities develop." For more information, contact **Michael Cockrum**.