

**CHAMBER & GARRETT COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS PARTNER
TO ADDRESS WORKFORCE SHORTAGE: Launch Work Ethic Diploma Program**

McHenry, MD – The Garrett County Chamber of Commerce announced today the creation of a Work Ethic Diploma program in partnership with Garrett County Public Schools. The purpose of the program is to address the workforce challenges by creating a pipeline of prospective employees who possess those quality attributes desired by employers. By meeting established criteria, local students will earn a Work Ethic Diploma upon graduating which will guarantee them job interviews and better wages.

“It is very exciting to announce the creation of the Work Ethic Diploma program,” said Laura Fike, Executive Director of Garrett Mentors and Chair of the Chamber’s Workforce Development Task Force. “The Chamber has been hearing for quite some time how difficult it is for businesses to find employees, especially those that are reliable and will show up regularly with the right attitude. We discovered the Work Ethic Diploma program being utilized by other communities and realized this would be a good fit to address the workforce challenges in Garrett County.”

“I’m excited about connecting the business and education worlds together to mutually benefit our community. This is a great opportunity for our students to realize that things like attendance, leadership, attitude, etc., all matter and that this work ethic is prized in the ‘real world’. I hope this becomes a motivator for students to focus on these intangibles in order to become more marketable in their respective futures,” said Paul Edwards

The program is launching this spring and the 2019 graduating classes of Northern and Southern High Schools will be the first to have the opportunity to earn a Work Ethic Diploma.

During the launch, the Chamber will be announcing the program and explaining how businesses can become a partner. Two informational sessions for all businesses interested in finding quality employees have been scheduled:

Tuesday, April 10
9:00-10:00 a.m.
The Casselman Inn

Monday, April 16
5:30-6:30 p.m.
Oakland Armory

“The concept for a regional Garrett County Work Ethic initiative was brought to the Garrett County Chamber of Commerce by employers that felt students were not completing high school with the soft skills needed to be successful employees,” said Nicole Christian, Chamber President & CEO. “With the input of area educators, business leaders, and post-secondary representatives, standards were developed to measure work ethic in students.”

“The key for the program to be successful is the commitment of the businesses and students,” Christian continued. “If that happens, it will be mutually beneficial and everybody wins.”

The Work Ethic Diploma Program is designed to address the workforce challenges by:

- Supplying Garrett County employers with skilled workers.
- Producing an emerging workforce prepared to face the challenges of a global marketplace.

- Be a filtering for hiring and selecting candidates that have demonstrated knowledge, skills, abilities, and commitment to work.
- Reinforcing the value of positive Work Ethic and commitment to successful employment.
- Recognizing a common, identifiable metric of work habits.
- Developing and improving soft skills of Garrett County students.

“The long term economic sustainability for Garrett County will be dependent on our ability to source qualified employees to meet the staffing needs of our local businesses,” said Chuck Olsson, Vice President & Chief Human Resources Officer for First United Bank & Trust. “The Work Ethic Diploma will serve as a key development program for our high school children, and provide businesses with a pipeline of graduating seniors prepared to enter the workforce and successfully contribute.”

For local high school students participating in the program, they are guaranteed an interview as long as they meet job related qualifications for open positions.

For those that earn a Work Ethic Diploma, they are not only guaranteed an interview, but will receive a higher starting wage if hired.

To qualify for a Work Ethic Diploma, students must earn a minimum of points in the following criteria: Discipline Standard, Attendance Standard, Absence Standard, Work Experience, Community Service/Internship Project Standard, Overall Grade Point Average Standard, Team Work Standard, Drug Free (optional), Exit Interview (Seniors Only).

Lauren McCann, owner of Silver Tree Marine, added, “Finding entry level employees with the necessary skills to enter the workforce straight out of high school or during high school has proven to be difficult. The work ethic diploma is a great tool for a potential employee to highlight important skills such as attendance, reliability, responsibility and respectfulness to a potential employer. Trade skills are able to be taught on the job, but the work force diploma can show an employer, before hiring, that the potential employee has proven he or she is equipped with these basic entry level skills.”

The Chamber also hopes that by promoting the fact that being drug free can help our young people secure a job and earn better money, they can help to combat the opioid crisis ravaging our communities.

Brenda McDonnell, owner of Brenda’s Pizzeria/Trader’s Coffee House/Ace’s Run, commented, “It’s getting a little more difficult every season to find staff who are engaged and really want to work. This diploma will zoom in on the ambitious young adults who want to work. We will take them as a serious applicant and hopefully hire them and make them part of our Hospitality Family.”

Students will be receiving information from their respective Principals and Guidance Counselors in the coming months.

For businesses interested in learning more about the program, please attend one of the aforementioned informational sessions or contact Nicole Christian at 301.387.8745 or nicole@garrettchamber.com. You can register for the informational sessions online at www.visitdeepcreek.com or by calling Holly Lane at 301.387.6171.

The Garrett County Chamber of Commerce is the largest professional business association in the region with 600 members representing every industry in the community. The mission of the Chamber is to organize, support and represent Garrett County’s business community in advancing common interests and additionally to promote Garrett County’s hospitality and recreation industry by attracting visitors to the county through comprehensive marketing.

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Garrett County Chamber of Commerce
15 Visitors Center Drive
McHenry, MD 21541
301.387.4386
visitdeepcreek.com