

DavieCONNECT – Creating Innovative Workforce Solutions for Davie County



Carolyn McManamy, Director, DavieCONNECT

Davie County’s unprecedented 23% job growth over the past five years coupled with a low unemployment rate of 3.9% has left local employers in a quandary — how to find enough qualified workers.

Seeking to create a solution to the problem, the [Davie County Economic Development Commission](#) has kicked-off DavieCONNECT, an initiative designed to connect businesses to resources and kids to careers and to provide innovative workforce solutions for Davie County.

DavieCONNECT’s director, Carolyn McManamy, will apply the knowledge gained during eight years as president of the Davie County Chamber of Commerce to serve as a resource for local businesses, educators, and those in or entering the workforce by helping to align resources and programs and collaborating with community partners. She is excited about the opportunity to focus 100% of her attention on an issue she is passionate about — workforce development. Her eyes light up as she discusses the organization’s initiatives and shares the multitude of programs in the works and the impact they can have in Davie.

“There is a lot of attention on solving our workforce issues, yet we lack a cohesive coordination or alignment of the programs and resources available in Davie County. One aspect of my role is to serve as the centralized “core of knowledge” of workforce funding and programs available to our businesses, educators, and citizens and to communicate that information accordingly. Having served on the Piedmont Triad Workforce Development Board for many years, I have seen first-hand the impact of historic low unemployment and the misalignment of skills in the workforce. We benefit enormously by increasing awareness of local career opportunities, training and work-based programs like apprenticeships and internships as well as grant funding for on-the-job training and scholarships for college and certificate-based training.”



She believes education is key to assisting both local employers and potential employees. “We can improve the quality of our workforce through education by connecting businesses to educators to ensure graduates are career or college ready. When curriculum is aligned with business needs, we all succeed. Equally important will be connecting businesses to grants/funding for job training, apprenticeships, internships, and externships, and to help them develop such programs.”

In order for Davie County to continue to thrive, McManamy believes it is important to improve overall community awareness of local employers and local careers opportunities, especially with our students. One of her primary goals will be connecting students to career options through increased awareness at both the middle and high school level. Offering students multiple opportunities to learn about career options through business tours, career days, apprenticeships, internships, and job shadowing is key to expanding our workforce.

“Because of low unemployment, we are at a tipping point,” McManamy said. “Our employers are struggling to fill open positions and they are learning that traditional recruiting methods are not yielding the results they are seeking. Successful employers are going out into the community to recruit their employees. They are more engaged with our schools and are onsite meeting with students and informing them about career opportunities in their companies.”

“Apprenticeships, internships, and work-based learning programs are on the rise and having a positive impact for both our employers and students. Businesses are developing their own talent pipeline and addressing the skills gap, and in most cases, students are earning while they are learning and have an established career path when they complete their training.”

Two big initiatives that are in the works that will significantly impact the Davie County Workforce are soft skills training and a college promise program. “We know we have a skills gap where potential employees lack the requisite technical skills to do the jobs employers need. But our employers are also telling us our workforce needs better soft skills. The importance of showing up to work on time, not using a phone, working in a team environment, effectively communicating with coworkers and leadership cannot be overstated. While these skills seem intuitive to some, they are not, and the absence of these skills impacts productivity and can be toxic in the workplace.”

McManamy is working with Davie County Schools CTE Director Anthony Davis and Chuck Taylor of Sage Garden Care Center to develop a soft skills training program that can be implemented in the schools. The goal is to launch a pilot program at the high school and then to introduce it at the middle schools and elementary schools as well.

The second initiative she is working on is a College Promise program which would cover the cost of tuition and books for Davie County residents to attend up to two years at DCCC for an associate degree, transfer degree, or certification/training.

“Increasing the educational attainment of our workforce contributes to increased economic prosperity in the community,” McManamy said. While at the Davie County Chamber, she initiated the discussions of a college promise with the chamber board. At the time, the community focus was on developing an early education initiative and it was decided to wait until that program was launched. DavieLEADS is up and running and McManamy believes it is time to focus on a college promise. “Several communities and states have already initiated college promise programs, so the program structure exists. We need to determine what will work best in Davie County and how to fund it. Typically, the programs are public/private initiatives.”

To better communicate those opportunities, she plans to use social media and to create a workforce portal that will become a “one-stop shop” for local career and college/training information.

“Nearly every community is dealing with workforce-related issues,” McManamy said. “It’s a big multifaceted problem that requires creating solutions at the local level. That is what the DavieCONNECT initiative is, solutions that work for Davie County.”