

WORKFORCE FLORIDA, INC.
CHRIS HART IV, PRESIDENT/CEO

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Workforce Florida Board of Directors to Convene in Marianna

MARIANNA - Highlighting its longstanding commitment to increasing opportunities for businesses and job seekers in rural communities, the Workforce Florida Board of Directors will hold its quarterly meetings May 25-26 in Marianna. The meetings mark the first time the statewide workforce policy board has met in a rural county. Board members, partners and stakeholders from across Florida will meet at the Jackson County Agriculture Conference Center on Wednesday and Chipola College on Thursday.

"I'm looking forward to learning, first-hand, how collaborative efforts among leaders in workforce, education, industry and economic development are transforming rural economies," said Workforce Florida Vice Chair Mary Lou Brunell. "Nearly half of Florida's counties are rural. This is a timely opportunity to strategically examine where these communities fit within the state's transitioning workforce and economic development vision."

Meeting highlights include a tour of the Family Dollar Distribution Center as well as a dialogue with leaders whose companies have chosen to locate in rural Florida - some of them with global customers. With a focus on job creation, executives from Family Dollar, Green Circle Bio Energy Inc., Oglesby Plants International Inc. and WestPoint Home Inc. have been invited to discuss why they chose to locate - and in some cases expand - in Jackson County and the workforce skills their employees need today and in the future in order for their businesses to remain competitive.

"Workforce Florida has a history of collaborating to strengthen the talent pipeline in rural communities statewide and, ultimately, their economies," said Workforce Florida President/CEO Chris Hart IV. "I'm proud of our track record of increasing opportunities for business and job seekers who choose to make their home in rural Florida."

Florida has 24 Workforce Boards that design and direct workforce services to businesses and individuals across the state. Each year, Workforce Florida's Board provides additional direct

funding to rural workforce regions to assist them in responding to the employment and training needs in their communities spurring economic growth. Most recently, \$600,000 was designated for rural workforce initiatives for five Regional Workforce Boards. Four of them - the Chipola Regional Workforce Board, North Florida Workforce Board, Florida Crown Workforce Board and Heartland Workforce - serve communities within Rural Areas of Critical Economic Concern (RACEC). The fifth - the Workforce Development Board of Okaloosa and Walton Counties - serves counties that face similar economic challenges.

Among Workforce Florida's special initiatives aimed at addressing rural workforce development needs is \$250,000 awarded to the Florida Learning Alliance. The funding is being used for a Rural Broadband Education Campaign, which aims to educate citizens and businesses in rural communities about the benefits of broadband and provide them with a trusted broadband resource.

Through the Quick Response Training grants administered by Workforce Florida, nearly \$1.3 million was awarded to companies in rural communities to provide training in photovoltaic design and installation, sustainable homes design, utility and water/wastewater operation. Nearly 725 people were trained through this initiative.

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About Workforce Florida Inc.

Workforce Florida Inc. is the statewide workforce investment board led by business and government leaders and charged with overseeing Florida's workforce system, which includes the Agency for Workforce Innovation and 24 Regional Workforce Boards. Its mission is to develop strategies that help Floridians enter, remain and advance in the workforce while supporting economic development priorities and strengthening the state's business climate. Florida's workforce system provided services including job search, referral and placement assistance as well as training to nearly 3 million job seekers and employers last year. Learn more about Florida's workforce resources and solutions at www.EmployFlorida.com.

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