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**CONSTRUCTING EDUCATION THROUGH COLLABORATION**

*ARCHBOLD, OHIO –* Partnerships are always sought after, and in most cases, necessary for success across all industry and education. In Defiance County a new partnership has taken place to meet an industry need, education need, and human need. The Defiance Dream Center, Defiance City Schools, OhioMeansJobs-Defiance and Paulding Counties, Defiance County Economic Development Office, and Northwest State Community College have come together to provide a high school construction course that will enable seven students to earn valuable skills and a Lean Yellow Belt Certification.

The courses, offered at the Defiance Dream Center, will allow students to spend three hours a day in the Dream Center's life-giving environment learning hands-on high demand skills like, carpentry, residential electrical, residential plumbing, and masonry while also working through a number of interpersonal and soft skills, much needed in today’s workforce. The Defiance Dream Center has offered construction courses in the past to adults, but this will be their first experience at the high school level. Guiseppe Blanchard, Director of Operations for the Defiance Dream Center said, “We are extremely excited and blessed to be in a position to partner with NSCC, OhioMeansJobs, Defiance High School and Defiance County Economic Development to bring this type of hands on and relational training to yet another population of our community. We see this as a huge win for our city and we hope is just the beginning.” Currently, the Dream Center is serving multiple populations through their workforce programming, including adults, Defiance High School students, and a life skills course for younger high school students that focuses on self-reliance in auto repair and home repair.

The OhioMeansJobs-Defiance and Paulding County Office continues to play an intricate role in funding this collaboration and providing wrap-around services such as tutoring, employability skills, and job readiness skills. Tiffany Dargenson, Workforce Administrator for OhioMeansJobs Defiance and Paulding County believes this program is a great fit for the local community. “We collaborate with local businesses, agencies, educational institutions, as well as community members to align services amongst partners to meet a common goal of maintaining a thriving community. The office continues to push hard in both Defiance and Paulding Counties, creating opportunities for local high school students and residents in the welding, automotive, construction, and manufacturing industries.”

This opportunity is a great pathway to a career, and Jay Jerger, Principal at Defiance High School is very excited to see this program come to fruition. “I have been working with Superintendent Morton for over a year and half now, brainstorming, surveying, questioning, and tackling the task of providing workforce development opportunities for more of our students. One of our pillars within our district's strategic plan is workforce development. This partnership creates options and opportunities, both educationally and for employment. We are excited and optimistic to see our students succeed.” The program will not only provide a Lean Yellow Belt credential, but will deliver 42 hours of carpentry training, 20 hours of residential plumbing training, 20 hours of residential electrical training, 20 hours of masonry training, employability skills. Superintendent Bob Morton is excited for the opportunity as well. “This is an outstanding opportunity for our students to gain valuable technical training and job skills. This has been a vision of the Defiance City Schools Board of Education's Strategic plan of Workforce Development. This partnership is another example of our community's commitment to our youth. We are excited for our students.”

Northwest State Community College continues to be on the forefront of workforce training in Northwest Ohio, working alongside numerous industries and community partners to create solutions and pathways for learners and local industries. Jim Drewes, Vice President of Workforce Development at NSCC, believes this is another great example of partnerships. “This is another prime example of what happens when different organizations come together to offer opportunities to local students to meet local employment needs.” Northwest State Community College Incoming President, Todd Hernandez, believes this is another opportunity for NSCC to make an impact locally. “Providing access to affordable training opportunities to improve the local community is a staple for Northwest State Community College and this collaboration is another example of our commitment to our mission, learners, and community.”

Carla Hinkle from the Defiance County Economic Development Office continues to make great progress with the local schools, assisting in the development of a pipeline of local skilled labor. “So exciting to see a great partnership form, Defiance County is so fortunate to have so many people who understand that workforce career education for high school students is so important.” Hinkle is currently assisting with the Dream Center’s adult automotive class, teaching employability skills to the learners.

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*Northwest State Community College is an accredited two-year, state-assisted institution of higher education that has served northwest Ohio since 1969. Northwest State is committed to providing a quality, affordable education with personal attention and small class sizes. The College offers associate degrees with numerous transfer options, short-term certificate programs, and workforce training programs designed to meet the needs of local businesses and industries. For more information, visit NorthwestState.edu or call 419.267.5511.*