

Training funds benefit 200 in county

Local Workforce Development Council puts federal stimulus assistance to work

By **LIBBY TUCKER**
Columbian staff writer

Results are in for the Southwest Washington Workforce Development Council's worker training program funded by federal stimulus dollars.

The SWWDC last summer received nearly \$2.8 million under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to retrain low-income adults and dislocated workers in Clark, Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties. Slightly more than \$2 million was allocated to workers in Clark County.

To date, 86 percent of the funds have been spent, according to the Washington Employment Security Department.



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The state originally gave the offices until June 30 to spend the funds, but the deadline has since been extended.

Two hundred participants from Clark County have completed training at Clark College in 14 programs, according to preliminary data provided to The Columbian by the Workforce Development Council. Of those who finished the program by June 30, 10 decided to continue their education, finding other sources of funding to do so. About 70

found jobs with their new skills.

Statewide data on the employment status of training program graduates isn't yet available, said Sheryl Hutchison, a spokeswoman for Employment Security.

A 35 percent employment success rate for Clark County may seem low at first glance, but several factors must be considered in evaluating this number, said Jordana Barclay, development council program manager.

Though the program's ultimate goal is to help laid-off workers find new jobs, the program directors didn't expect immediate results, Barclay said. Training

FEDERAL STIMULUS FOR LOW-INCOME ADULT AND DISLOCATED WORKER TRAINING

as of June 30

IN CLARK, COWLITZ AND WAHKIAKUM COUNTIES

\$2,769,205 received.
\$2,373,752 spent.
86 percent spent.

IN CLARK COUNTY

\$2,078,000 received.
200 participants completed training.
10 continued their education.
70 found jobs.
35 percent found jobs.

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SOURCE: Washington state Employment Security Department,
Southwest Washington Workforce Development Council

Training:

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programs varied in length from several weeks to several months, so many of the program participants only recently finished school and haven't had time to find work. The development council also chose programs in occupations that local labor forecasters predicted would see higher demand for skilled workers in coming years, not necessarily right away.

"The intent really was to take this opportunity when there weren't a lot of jobs to get people up-skilled or new skills so when the economy does recover they'll have all the tools they need for the post-recession job market," Barclay said.

The state's dislocated worker program retrains workers who have lost jobs due to plant clo-

sures or mass layoffs in declining or disappearing industries, such as wood and paper products.

The Workforce Development Council worked with WorkSource to find workers who qualified for the program and then match them to training programs that aligned with their skills and interests.

The council also worked closely with Clark College to design programs that would meet the work force needs of the county's growing industries.

Choosing which fields had the highest demand for workers was a challenge for program organizers because much of the available work force data were collected before the recession began, said Todd Oldham, Clark College executive director for corporate and continuing education.

Ultimately the college offered eight new programs created specifically for training under

the stimulus grant, in addition to six existing programs. Automotive technician, cardiovascular technician, energy auditor and dental assistant were among the career options available to eligible adults.

The grants paid tuition and expenses to Clark College for workers in the training programs.

Because the Workforce Development Council met all of the state's requirements for distributing the ARRA funds, Clark County will receive an additional \$1.1 million in federal funds to continue the training programs this year, said Barclay.

Clark College will offer training to become an electronic health records specialist, certified nursing assistant or to enter jobs in mechatronics or public utilities technology.

Training slots for eligible workers are still available for classes starting this fall. For more information, call WorkSource in Vancouver, 360-735-5000.