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Critical Skills Gap Awareness Summit: Lots of Open High Paying Jobs

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Kaskaskia College President George Evans addresses the Critical Skills Gap Awareness Summit held in the Kaskaskia College Lifelong Learning Center on Wednesday night. Photo by Bruce Kropp.

The message was repeated 19 times Wednesday night at the South Central Illinois Growth Alliance Critical Skills Gap Awareness Summit, with slightly different variations. There are many open high paying careers in manufacturing and vocational fields in the local area. Some of the business representatives say the lack of qualified employees has stunted their growth potential. Others complained about the lack of basic hard and soft skills, from poor math and science ability to not being able to show up on time.

College President George Evans noted the jobs discussed during the forum on average paid \$30 an hour or \$62,000 a year. He adds most did not require a costly four-year college degree and in some cases, any needed training was covered by the industry or through a paid apprenticeship. Evans says that compares to many running up a big debt to get a four-year degree for a job that pays \$30,000 a year.

"I think the overall message is the same thing we've been preaching for a long time, the careers are there. You had 19 people on the panel tell this to the audience and the potential wages they can make with little or no investment....or with some kind of tuition reimbursement and still maintain your residence in a good area. I think the audience if they were paying attention for 2.5 hours, it really should have hit home how many lucrative careers there are right here in their backyard."

Dean of Career and Technical Education Nic Farley explains the next step to promote the need to fill industrial and vocational jobs.

"From the SCIGA perspective, we've got to continue to promote that message and bring more partners in. And the ask really is to get buy-in from these factories to allow us in, and we need to reach out to mom, dad, and school administrators and bring them into these events. The biggest thing is broadening our base of people that we are bringing to these events."

And several of the panelists warned the situation isn't expected to improve with smaller numbers entering the workforce and a large number of retirements among the baby boomers. A number of school administrators were among those in the audience at the Kaskaskia College Lifelong Learning Center to hear from the area industries and vocational employers.



A large crowd of educators, students, and others with an interest in economic development attended the 2nd Annual Skills Gap Awareness Program. Photo by Bruce Kropp.

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