

Educating the workforce in changing and challenging times

By Steven Hoffman
Staff Writer

These are changing—and challenging—times for workers in the United States.

The U.S. unemployment rate dipped to 6.6 percent in January, which is a five-year low, but it is still far from “full employment unemployment rate”—the theoretical optimal level of employment for adults in an economy. There were times during the 1950s and 1960s when the unemployment rate in the United States fell to around 3 percent, and the employment rate briefly stood at 3.3 percent in late 2000. There’s no predicting when, or if, the economy will return to those levels.

Additionally, because of changes in technology and in business practices, workers today are competing in a very different market than just a generation ago: Companies are looking to hire directors of analytics, user-experience directors, sustainability directors, mobile application developers, and web analysts.

At the same time, workers are still needed for traditional jobs like carpentry or welding, and many positions in manufacturing remain unfilled because employers can’t find qualified workers to fill them. There’s also a severe shortage of nurses to care for the aging U.S. population.

For Progress 2014, we decided to take a look at how universities, community colleges, and other workforce training programs are preparing, or in some cases retraining, the workers of today for the jobs that are now available to them. Here’s what we learned...

Practical Nursing Program offers a practical solution for men and women looking for a career change

By Steven Hoffman
Staff Writer

There aren’t enough nurses to care for the U.S. population and the shortage is only expected to intensify over the next 15 years as the causes of the shortage—aging Baby Boomers, an

aging nursing workforce, changes in technology, and the access to health care—all continue to grow.

Patty Knecht, Director of Practical Nursing for the Chester County Intermediate Unit, said that projections that the U.S. government relies on show that the older population—



Courtesy photo

Brian Bradley previously worked as a construction worker, but then traded in his hard hat for a stethoscope. He graduated from the Practical Nursing Program at the Chester County Intermediate Unit and now works as an LPN at Tel Hai Retirement Community in Honey Brook.

Courtesy photo
Janece Richardson said that she decided that she wanted to switch careers and enter the Practical Nursing Program after she received such good treatment from nurses while she was pregnant in 2009. "I wanted to make people feel like these nurses made me feel," she said.



men and women over the age of 65—is in the process of increasing from 35 million in 2000 to 72 million in 2030.

"It's pretty staggering what we're facing," Knecht said. "The nursing shortage is expected to continue."

Pennsylvania ranks fourth in the U.S. in the number of residents who are over the age of 65, so the shortage here will be felt more than most places.

The nursing shortage makes the nursing field a desirable one for men and women who are looking for a career. For people looking for a new work opportunity, nursing can be a stable, rewarding, and well-respected career. People who choose nursing as a career typically find steady jobs with a healthy paycheck—the average salary of a licensed practical nurse (LPN) is \$45,000—not to mention the satisfaction of caring for others.

"It's a great career pathway," Knecht said.

For Janece Richardson, the decision to enroll in the Chester County Intermediate Unit's Practical Nursing Program was not an easy one.

The 31-year-old Coatesville, Pa. woman had an established career working in marketing.

She had earned promotions at her job in the past, but had reached a point where she felt like she couldn't advance any further.

Richardson's experiences when she was pregnant with her daughter in 2009 influenced her decision to pursue a nursing career.

"I wanted to make people feel like these nurses made me feel," she said. "I've always been the type of person who liked to care for others."

It was a difficult decision for Richardson to walk away from her salary to go back to school, but she knew that pursuing a career in nursing would be the best long-term plan for her family.

"In order to pursue this dream, I had to give something up," she said. "You just have to think about what it's going to be worth. I feel like I made the right decision. At the end of the day, I made a choice to better our future."

Ryan Schneider, 29, of Coatesville, made a similar decision. He had worked several jobs, including one as a heavy equipment operator, but didn't see the opportunity for future advancement.

"I couldn't move forward in those jobs," he explained.

Several family members had commented that caring for people came naturally to him, so after giving it some thought he enrolled in

the Practical Nursing Program in November of 2012. He expects to graduate from the program next month and will enter a job market where his talents and training are very much in demand.

Knecht said that they see a wide variety of people entering the nursing field.

"We attract a diverse population into the program," she said, adding that nursing students have ranged in age from 18 to 67. "We also attract an ethnically diverse group into the program."

The Practical Nursing Program can be a good route for those switching careers because it prepares students to pass the licensing exam and enter the workforce as an LPN where they can find jobs at long-term care facilities, hospitals, physicians' offices, schools and outpatient clinics. Knecht explained that while some hospitals are moving away from utilizing as many LPNs, there is still a great deal of demand for them in the health care industry.

For students who complete the Chester County Intermediate Unit's Practical Nursing Program to become an LPN, there are additional opportunities to continue their studies at schools like Delaware County Community College.

"We really believe in career pathways at the CCIU," Knecht ex-

plained. "One of the positives of the nursing program is that we really do work collaboratively with a lot of different people in the area."

Students with advanced education in nursing have secured administrative positions including Director of Nursing or Nursing Home Administrator. Others have continued their studies to become nurse practitioners. There is a need for nurses with various levels of certification and training.

"The projections are strong in all categories," Knecht explained.

Knecht said that more than half the students who have gone through the Practical Nursing Program have tried some other post-secondary school before succeeding at nursing. Knecht said that she often hears that students really succeed as a result of the one-on-one instruction that takes place in the Practical Nursing Program.

Students who want to complete the program in 15 months usually have class from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. five days a week. When clinicals start, they attend from 7:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Schneider said that the staff

Continued on page 25

Education...

Continued from page 23



Courtesy photo

Ryan Schneider said that entering the Practical Nursing Program was a great choice for him and becoming an LPN will give him a lot more job opportunities in the future.

makes the transition to the Practical Nursing Program an easy one.

"I had never worked in health care before," Schneider explained. "I didn't know if I had the necessary skill set to do this. There's always a fear when you haven't done something yet."

He said that his teachers were extremely helpful, and through preparation and repetition he quickly gained confidence and became immersed in developing the necessary skills to become an LPN. Schneider eventually did some of his work at the Bryn Mawr Rehabilitation Hospital. He said that the greatest lessons he learned while at Bryn Mawr came in the Brain Injury Unit, where he was amazed at the progress that the patients were able to make through hard work.

In order to adequately prepare students for the challenges of the nursing profession, the program is demanding but fast-paced. Students can complete the program in as few as 15 months. In addition to the 1,635 hours of study, including 700 hours of clinical rotation, students also gain hands-on clinical experience at facilities like the Chester County Hospital, Bryn Mawr Rehabilitation Hospital, and Pocopson Home. The Practical Nursing Program has rolling enrollment deadlines and flexible scheduling at two locations—Downingtown and West Grove.

Richardson said that she would recommend the nursing program for anyone who is thinking about entering the field.

"I am an advocate of nursing schools. If anyone is thinking about a career in nursing, this is one of the best decisions that I've made in my life," she said.

"I definitely love this field," Schneider agreed. "It has met or exceeded all my expectations. The LPN program was a great choice. Moving forward, this is a great opportunity for me. There are so many directions that I can go in."

To contact Staff Writer Steven Hoffman, email editor@chestercounty.com.

Continued on page 26

*** WINTER *** CLEARANCE SALE

**SOFAS
RECLINERS
MATTRESSES
END TABLES
and much more...**

Its time to **say goodbye to some of
our floor samples**

Filacheck's



Major Credit
Cards Accepted

343 E. Baltimore Pike (Old U.S. Rt.1), West Grove, PA, 19390
610.869.3351 • www.filachecksfurniture.com

Tues, Wed & Sat 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. • Thurs & Fri 10 a.m. - 8 p.m. • Closed Sun & Mon