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Here for the taking

Gas industry jobs pave way for opportunity

November 19, 2010 - By MIKE REUTHER mreuther@sungazette.com

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Gas drilling industry and related jobs are here for the taking, and there's no end in sight to the supply of work that will be available.

Industry experts, workforce officials and other employers testifying at a state Senate hearing in Williamsport Thursday made it clear that the northcentral region is undergoing a remarkable economic transformation from gas drilling.

The Senate Majority Policy Committee, which included state Sen. E. Eugene Yaw, R-Loyalsock Township, queried various officials who testified at the hearing at Pennsylvania College of Technology.

Yaw was joined on the panel by other lawmakers, including state Reps. Garth Everett, R-Muncy, and Matthew E. Baker, R-Wellsboro.

Larry L. Michael, executive director of Penn College's Workforce & Economic Development program, stated that job opportunities from the Marcellus Shale present the largest impact of anything ever experienced in the region.

He cited a Pennsylvania Economy League report that says each gas industry job created means an additional "1.52 indirect and induced jobs" throughout the economy.

To keep pace, the college's Marcellus Shale Education & Training Center has trained more than 1,000 students in the past 10 months on natural gas-specific issues, including 800 already employed in the industry.

"We believe that the economic and workforce opportunities are huge," he said. "The magnitude of this opportunity will not only transform this region of the state but will provide the foundation resources to greatly enhance the overall economic health and job creation opportunities of the commonwealth."

Perry Harris, northeast U.S. district manager of Halliburton, said the company has 750 state residents on its payroll and is looking for new workers every day.

He noted recent development by the company with its facility near Montgomery, where 181 people are employed, and more will be hired.

Michael Narcavage, manager of corporate development for the Chesapeake Energy Corp., said that every dollar invested by gas production companies nearly doubles the economic output.

In the past year, the company has expanded its statewide workforce from about 250 full-time personnel to more than 1,100, many of those jobs in Bradford County, where the majority of the company's operations are located.

Harris and Narcavage added that both companies contribute to local community and civic organizations as well.

Robert Garland, senior technical adviser of Universal Well Services, said 68 people from Williamsport have been hired by his company since mid-January, with plans to more than double its entire workforce in 2011.



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Blue collar workers, both unskilled and semi-skilled, will be needed.

Williamsport-Lycoming Chamber of Commerce President Vincent Matteo said it was his guess that the area will not be able to supply the industry with all the workers it needs.

Michael agreed that, in most cases, there will not be enough workers.

"We are attempting to develop training programs as fast as we can," he said.

Baker, whose legislative district encompasses Tioga County and part of Bradford County, commented he has never before seen so many "help wanted" signs.

Hotels, restaurants, retailers and other businesses all have benefited economically from the gas industry.

Matteo added that Lycoming County is experiencing the economic upsurge as well.

"It's non-stop," he said.

Frank Thompson, director of the Northern Tier Workforce Investment Board, said that anyone in the region who wants a job can find one.

Between June and September of this year the CareerLink in Lycoming County reported 596 new hirings, including 214 directly attributed to gas-related positions, according to Shannon Miller, executive director of the Central Pennsylvania Workforce Development Corp.

Miller, whose organization coordinates funding for employment and training programs in nine counties, including Lycoming, noted that the area has an over-supply of available labor.

"It, however, is not accurate to say that all individuals looking for work are a good fit for employment in the natural gas industry, which requires a different mindset, work ethic and skill set than the region's manufacturing base," she said.

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