



IN THE Corridor

JUNE 2018

PREPARING WORKERS FOR SKILLED JOBS TODAY AND IN THE FUTURE

VISION NORTH IOWA AND Future Ready Iowa are focusing local and state resources on preparing workers for skilled jobs today and in the future.

Future Ready Iowa is a state initiative to build Iowa's "talent pipeline" to align with modern job requirements. Its goal is for 70 percent of Iowa's workforce to achieve education or training beyond high school by 2025.

This is in line with predictions that two out of three American jobs in 2025 will require more than a high school education. The State of Iowa wants to focus attention on the need to prepare our workforce, ultimately building a better economy and a better place to live.

Gary Schmit, president of Henkel Construction in Mason City, served on the Future Ready Iowa Alliance committee, which developed and released a strategic plan in 2017 for meeting that goal. The panel of about 50 people, appointed by then Governor Branstad, represented both public and private sectors.

Schmit also is a board member of North Iowa Corridor Economic Development Corporation. The North Iowa Corridor and the Chambers of Commerce for

Mason City and Clear Lake worked together in 2017 on their own strategic plan called Vision North Iowa. It dovetails with Future Ready Iowa, but focuses on local needs.

"One of the goals within Vision North Iowa is having a skilled workforce, but it's more encompassing than just that," Schmit said. Vision North Iowa also includes action plans to build a regional community, attract innovation and entrepreneurship, and promote the area as a destination for businesses.

"One of the things where Future Ready Iowa aligns with Vision North Iowa is to try to inform students looking for careers that there are different options out there. College is not for everybody, though it's great for some."

Both plans want young people to know they can still have a good career without the time and expense of a four-year degree, according to Schmit. Alternatives such as community colleges, internships, apprenticeships, and certification programs can add to a person's career training after high school or even later in life.

Schmit sees firsthand in the construction business how vital this is for the region. "It's important

that we have the skilled workforce available so we have the employees to complete our work. That includes the other trades to finish projects, like electricians, welders, and bricklayers.

"The construction industry lost a lot of workers from 2008 to 2010 in the last economic downturn, and we didn't really get them back," he explained. "So that's why we're reaching out to schools."

Patti Hanson, Regional Workforce Development Director at IowaWORKS - North Iowa, explained, "We can use Future Ready Iowa to support our local initiative. They may come up with programs to help us, such as helping people achieve certifications."

Hanson said the greatest local need for skilled labor right now is in the construction industry, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing.

"Vision North Iowa and Future Ready Iowa are both geared towards building the talent pipeline. We have a common goal," she said. "Vision North Iowa will help us fill the skills gap we see and focus on the industries and sectors specifically here, and we can use Future Ready Iowa to help us reach those goals."

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