

STUDENT INTERNS::

VERMONT'S FUTURE WORKFORCE



One of the most common issues facing Vermont business is finding “qualified” candidates to fill open positions. “Qualified” is a constantly evolving term, which for professional jobs today means earning a college degree, with 2-3 years of relevant work experience, plus basic computer skills, and don’t forget professional communications for culturally diverse workplace. And even with a “qualified” candidate, there may be a discrepancy between what the organization seeks, and what a candidate can offer. One success story is work-based learning experience to improve the pipeline of accessibility between organizations and students, beginning at the high school level - or sooner.

The TIPS Program, Training Interns and Partnering for Success, administered by the Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce provides local high schools with a course curriculum in workforce readiness, followed by an experiential learning internship for credit. Through TIPS internships, students learn how an organization functions and are exposed to Vermont’s workforce before graduation. As a result, these students learn more about their own interests and capabilities before investing in a college degree. They are also more likely to continue in this workplace, eventually as a paid employee, and ultimately as a contributor to the Vermont workforce. Employers who chose to hire interns, invest in their talent pipeline, ensuring the development of required skills. The earlier the students are connected to business, the better the chance of learning in the field, fitting in to the business culture, and narrowing the gap between “qualified” candidates and available skills.

Essex Rescue, Executive Director, Dan Manz: “When we have a high school student at The Rescue, we view it as the chance to add a volunteer member after they complete the internship - which would be great! The costs for training an intern are not high, and as an agency, we’re interested in public education, so hosting a high school student lets us have the opportunity to educate and demonstrate who we are.” Manz also said that student interns add a unique and resourceful perspective to the organization. “Interns bring a fresh set of eyes. They can be shown how operations in here [Essex Rescue] occur, and students are useful to help with projects or out on calls. These kids come in and conduct themselves professionally. It [the internship] gives them the chance to be an adult.”

Some organizations expose interns to a fast-paced medical environment, while others give students a chance to make a positive impact on the next generation. Intern host, Kyle de Palma from the Sara Holbrook Community Center in Burlington says, “Having a High School Intern contributed to our organization in a couple of ways. [Our intern] and most other volunteers almost become celebrity-like to some of the kids we serve. They look forward to the days when they [volunteers] are supposed to come. It’s like a big brother connection where the kids are just happy to have someone a little older to play with.”

To learn more about the TIPS program, please contact tips@vermont.org.

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From your staff at the Chamber, we wish you a healthy and prosperous New Year. As this message is being written, the country anxiously awaits the inauguration of our next President and the beginning of what appears to be a new chapter in American politics. Much speculation abounds and, if history teaches us anything, it is that our worst fears rarely come to be and our highest hopes often fall short.

In Vermont, Governor Scott has taken the oath of office, his team is in place and a new legislative leadership team is busy establishing themselves in roles unfamiliar. As Vermonters, we should all take heart by the tone that is being set across branches of government and political parties. As we face unknown budget troubles from Washington and as we confront our own sizeable deficit, our elected leaders are pledging bi-partisan action to stabilize our economy, create a state that is both welcoming and affordable to all and to ensure that the most troubled, disadvantaged and vulnerable are surrounded by a strong safety net. Surely, there is going to be disagreement on how our state achieves these goals. The key that we must all keep in mind is that the value set that underpins our political dialogue is consistent. With that as a foundation, reasonable solutions will ultimately be found.

As you know from your Chamber's Facebook and Twitter posts, we host a live radio show on WDEV on the first and third Thursdays of the month from 11-noon. The purpose behind these shows is to offer members and political leaders the opportunity to discuss topics related to our economy in a non-partisan manner. Our hope is that the listener will learn something from the discussion and become a more informed advocate for issues. On some level, it doesn't matter if folks agree or disagree with a position taken by the Chamber. The best outcome is a citizen who makes a choice fully apprised of all the facts. We have discussed tax policy, affordable and available child care, the opiate epidemic and independent contractor legislation among other topics. It is fair and generous to say that even the co-hosts don't always agree on how we should approach the topic. The bottom line is that our discussions have always been informed and civil—a model for how discourse should be handled in the capital along the Potomac.

Included in this issue, on page 3, is the Chamber's Legislative Policy Framework. It outlines the areas where your Government Affairs Team will spend most of their energy. It was developed with the input of staff, member committees, your Board and Executive Committee. Please take the time to review it and offer your comments and ideas – whether you agree or not. We truly want and need to hear your opinions. We would like to have more members engaged the dialogue occurring in Montpelier. This can take the form of testifying, making phone calls, writing letters or simply meeting with staff.

Thanks for your continued support of your organization and I look forward to hearing from you.



Every year the LCRCC works with its members to identify a few key focus areas leading up to the legislative session. This year, these areas focus on three main components that align with the LCRCC's strategic objectives. Please take a few moments to read through our legislative priorities for the 2017 session and be sure to stay up to date on news from the State House by checking out our weekly legislative reports. You can sign up for the Legislative Updates by going to our FaceBook page. www.facebook.com/lcrcc.

2017 Legislative Policy Framework

Support for a Thriving Private Sector Economy:

- Define Independent Contractors for the purposes of Workers' Compensation and Unemployment Insurance, reflecting both the needs of our 21st century workforce and Vermont's long tradition of independent business people.
- Create 'time certain' permit and regulatory decisions to allow businesses to move forward or redirect their efforts.
- Support economic incentives and training programs targeted to new and expanding businesses, to include raising the cap on VEGI and having a single government agency review and dispense federal training dollars.
- Revise current storm water regulations to permit businesses and municipalities to collaborate on reaching net zero requirements within current time structure.

Affordability & Efficiency:

- Align State budget growth with the growth of Vermont's economy.
- Begin the process to pass a Constitutional Amendment setting a 4-year term for the Governor and enact legislation mandating biennial budgets.
- Fee increases should be in line with cost of living increases and not used in lieu of raising taxes.
- Adopt a five to ten-year plan to retire unfunded pension liabilities for state employees and teachers and then fund on an ongoing basis new commitments.
- Refine our health care regulatory process so that it encourages competition and improves service and quality outcomes without escalating costs to businesses or their employees.
- Focus on measures that increase efficiency within our health care delivery system in order to reduce health care costs.
- Prioritize housing creation that is affordable to working Vermonters. There is a significant need in Northwest Vermont for single family homes at 300,000 or less.

Workforce:

- Coordinated through the Agency of Commerce, market Vermont as a place to live, work and visit, with sufficient funds to reach national markets through multi-media platforms and targeted sector outreach.
- Define the skills gap between current vacant jobs and current talent pool to undertake a formal state directed initiative, using private sector training partners.
- Better define the costs to expand early education and the anticipated outcomes. Expansion should use savings found through K-12 and other efficiencies.
- The cost of requiring paid time off above current benefit levels must be quantified prior to enacting legislation mandating this additional benefit.

HEALTH CARE::
HEALTH CARE POLICY OVERVIEW

The health care landscape continues to rapidly evolve as both our state and nation react to the reform efforts of the past six years. The overarching principles that guided the Chamber's support for reform have remained constant: quality of patient care; improved health care outcomes and cost control. In 2011, the Chamber issued more specific criteria enumerated below (and edited for grammar and relevancy in 2017). Changes at any level must be judged against these and be found to withstand scrutiny.

1. Any health system should promote quality, be accountable for the management of its costs, and emphasize continuous improvement in both quality and cost metrics.
2. Health insurance plans offered through a Vermont program must be aligned with federal health care requirements as they evolve.
3. All programs should emphasize preventative care and wellness efforts.
4. Employers and employees must share in the cost of health insurance.
5. All public insurance plans (municipal; teachers; state employees) must be rolled into any new system.
6. Health care plans cannot be so expensive such that they place Vermont businesses at a competitive disadvantage or make the prospect of locating/expanding a business in Vermont undesirable.
7. Changes to Vermont's system must not negatively affect ERISA based plans or create a disincentive for a Vermont firm to expand out of state or for companies based in other states to locate in Vermont.
8. Payments to health care providers and facilities must cover the actual cost of providing services and allow for investments (capital and technological) that will improve quality care and allow for cutting edge research to occur in Vermont.
9. Payments to providers must ensure that we can attract and retain the best providers and maintain the competitiveness of our teaching hospital and medical school.
10. Payments to providers need to be uniform regardless of the payer to avoid perpetuating the cost shift.
11. Payments to providers and health care facilities must be based on populations served and outcomes achieved. Increased provider compensation should be available for outcomes that exceed expectations.

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LAUNCHVT::
LOOK WHAT STARTED HERE

@LAUNCHVT

What do physics-defying skis, an organic skincare line, and virtual reality software have in common? They're all the innovative products of recent LaunchVT first-place winners. Our business pitch competition is entering its fifth year, and we've tallied up our impact. In just four years, LaunchVT has:

- Supported 33 startups with mentoring and opportunities for exposure,
- Provided networking opportunities to over 250 entrepreneurs and aspiring business owners in Vermont, and
- Awarded more than \$300,000 in prize money and resources to nine companies.

We're thrilled to be playing a critical role in the entrepreneurial community, but even these stellar numbers don't tell the whole story. Check out some of our favorite LaunchVT success stories:

- 2016 first-prize winner Ogee launched its organic skincare line 4 months after winning LaunchVT and was immediately featured on InStyle.com and People.com.
- 2015 first-prize winner Renoun was recently featured in Entrepreneur Magazine and has a sponsor deal to have his skis worn by X-Games star Mike Nick.
- 2015 second-prize winner PunchPass's revenue has tripled since LaunchVT, and the company has acquired office space and a full-time employee.
- 2014 first-prize winner IrisVR now employs 13 people and recently raised \$8 million in Series A funding. Its cofounders Nate Beatty and Shane Scranton were featured in this year's Forbes Magazine's 30 Under 30.
- 2013 finalist Filabot has hired five full-time employees and three product lines since participating in LaunchVT. The company now outsources assembly to another Vermont company.

Startup activity in Vermont is soaring, and those entrepreneurs who have the opportunity to participate in LaunchVT get a leg up. As our 2016 second-prize winner Julie Lineberger said of her company Wheel Pad, "I used every single LaunchVT connection to pull this together." Renoun's founder Cyrus Schenck echoes the sentiment: "I would not be where I am without LaunchVT." Learn more about LaunchVT on their website, www.LaunchVT.com.

DAVID SEAVER PHOTOGRAPHY

PHOTO RECAP::
106TH ANNUAL DINNER



Trade agreements have had a run of bad press lately.

During the US election campaign, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) took center stage when candidate Trump said he would "tear up" the "worst trade agreement in history."

Political leaders need to be careful before tinkering with the NAFTA. After all, over 22 years have passed since the signing of NAFTA. It may have been a zero-sum game in 1994, but today, NAFTA is the rulebook for one of the world's most successfully integrated cross-border manufacturing sectors.

Because of NAFTA, Vermont sells more to Canada than to any other market. It's a two way street -- Canadian investments in Vermont businesses have steadily increased over the years.

Of course, the rest of the world has hardly stood still. Vermont business leaders know that competition in the North American marketplace is sure to increase in the years ahead, especially from the Pacific Rim. China remains the powerhouse, pursuing its trade leadership around the world, starting with its Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agenda with Japan and other neighbors.

These are uncertain times. But uncertainties bring risk as well as opportunity.

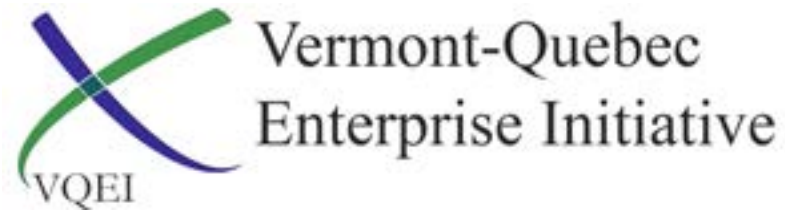
Modernizing our own regional partnership, NAFTA, is one such opportunity and it needs to begin in the boardroom.

The uncertainty raised by the elections should spur Vermont companies to take full stock of their North American supply chain and customer base. They will need to reacquire their key employees, including in-house counsel and financial executives, with the current NAFTA rules they have depended upon since 1994. They will want to assess their risk exposure and decide how best to position themselves in a new North American trade landscape.

The bottom line is that in anticipation of NAFTA 2.0, companies need to give their stakeholders assurance that their cross-border interests will be protected. Some are appreciating the consequences already - our firm has received numerous calls from CEOs to assess their company's risk exposure now that the ground has dramatically shifted. Their goal is to enhance their competitive edge.

For Washington, the goal should not be tearing NAFTA apart, but rather building it up.

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There are two things we often hear: businesses can't find the employees they need to grow, and many Vermont families struggle to make ends meet, often working more than one, low-paying job. It's not much of a leap to realize that our workforce training and education is falling short, leaving some Vermonters out and Vermont companies hamstrung on growth.

In his inaugural address, Governor Phil Scott honed in on the need to train Vermonters for the jobs that exist today (and we would argue that will exist in the future) and the need to re-imagine our education system. Specifically, he called attention data that shows that from "2000 to 2010 the number of 25-45 year olds in Vermont decreased by 30,000.... Since 2010, we've lost 16,000 workers... and that downward trend continues. We are losing 2,300 more every year, which means -- by tomorrow -- we'll have 6 fewer workers than we have today." He suggested that Vermont "must have a laser-focus on attracting and retaining working age people" noting that by increasing the number of people working in Vermont, we can grow state revenues "organically."

Governor Scott also pointed out that "we spend 1.6 billion annually on K through 12 education -- about 19,000 dollars per student, which is one of the highest in the country. However, we're not yet an education destination for young families." He also noted that while our spending on K-12 education is high, we spend comparatively little on pre-kindergarten and college commenting that "our level of support for state colleges and universities ranks one of the lowest in the nation."

Talent Development is one of the Chamber's strategic focus areas because we realize it is both the key to our members' future business success and our community's success. We are working on a number of initiatives that serve to develop our workforce and keep them here -- from our Burlington Young Professionals group which seeks to give young professionals the connections, education and mentoring to form connections to our community and workforce to our high school career skills and internship program, TIPS. We are excited about a renewed focus on improving our education and workforce training systems to ensure that every Vermonter looks around and sees opportunity and that our members find the qualified employees they need to succeed. If you'd like to be a part of our work, we would very much welcome your help.



Cathy Davis, LCRCC
 Executive Vice President

SAVE THE DATE::
UPCOMING CHAMBER EVENTS

February 22, 2017: New Member Reception at Shelburne Vineyard

March 12, 2017: Member Ski Day at Sugarbush

March 20, 2017: Legislative Breakfast Series

March 30, 2017: Butterflies & Bidding Silent Auction

June 5, 2017: 25th Annual Chamber Challenge Golf Tournament

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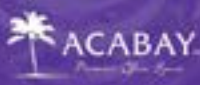
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