



Community and Economic Development in North Carolina and Beyond Blog: Mapping Healthcare Occupations in Lenoir County

By CED Program Interns & Students

Article: <https://ced.sog.unc.edu/mapping-healthcare-occupations-in-lenoir-county/>

This entry was posted on July 09, 2010 and is filed under Community-Campus Partnership, Economic Development, Lenoir County

Ben Houck is a graduate of the UNC Department of City and Regional Planning and a CCP Intern working in Lenoir County.

What do you think about when you hear the phrase “climbing the corporate ladder”? Is it moving from a mail room to a corner office or from sales floor to district manager? The concept of a career ladder is more than a metaphor. It is found in the toolbox of workforce development and is a central theme to this project. *Building Healthcare Career Ladders in Lenoir County* is an initiative funded through the Community-Campus Partnership Small Grants Program.

This project builds upon research generated in a spring workshop of 10 students within the Department of City and Regional Planning which was described **earlier** in this blog by Adam Parker. To kick off this workshop we toured a long-term care facility for developmentally disabled children and young adults. It was a new perspective for students accustomed to the walls of academia’s ivory tower and, truthfully, a detour from our usual task of poring through Census employment data. This health care provider, RHA Howell, with headquarters in La Grange, is one of several such facilities within Lenoir County.

This trip proved to be a lesson in economic development. The practice of attracting and retaining jobs, or even laying the groundwork for career ladders in a field as broad as health care, cannot be done without context. With this lesson in mind, Ashley Yingling – an Intern with RHA Howell and colleague on this project – and I set off on our first interviews in recent weeks. From our first meeting with a Program Coordinator with NC Health Careers Access Program we learned of efforts to attract minority students to health care occupations, a demographic often underrepresented in the health care field. And with resources such as AHEC dispersed throughout the state, we sense a broad and systematic effort to supply health care employers with talented professionals.

Still, health care employers face challenges in recruiting and retaining workers. One challenge, as we learned in speaking with the Lenoir County Public Health Department, is competing with wages offered by more urban, and even adjacent, counties. Another challenge, as we learned in speaking with a HR Representative with Britthaven, is that nursing is tough work which requires compassion and patience. Oftentimes, it entails responsibilities which stretch beyond original job descriptions or working night and weekend shifts for facilities which operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

One promising aspect of working in health care is the opportunity to advance within one’s field of practice. Navigating through the nursing field, for example, often involves lateral movements to new employment settings. In Lenoir County, these opportunities will soon become more robust with the opening of a 100-bed skilled nursing facility for veterans. Surveying and ground preparations are set to begin tomorrow, in fact, for the Kinston facility which may begin operations as soon as late 2011. Indeed, this facility will provide a valuable service to those who served our country as well as create around 185 new jobs for Lenoir County.

This adds to the hundreds of existing health care jobs in Lenoir County. By identifying fast-growing occupations and advancement opportunities within this field, we hope our efforts will help Lenoir County’s health care employers to understand each other more clearly and aid them in working collectively to solve their recruitment and retention challenges.