

Civic partnership aims to keep young people in area

■ The organization has established a scholarship program that will reward students studying in a field of local need.

By **JIM DINO**
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As superintendent of schools, Geraldine Shepperson has watched products of the Hazleton Area School District leave the area after college — because they say there are no job opportuni-

ties here for them.

She said there *are* job opportunities here.

It's just a matter of marrying the job with a student who has the right education.

That's why the Greater Hazleton Civic Partnership's new scholarship program is so important to stop this outmigration of the area's youth, she said.

"When Mr. (John) Zogby (the noted national pollster) did the survey of the area, it indicated people would like to return here,

but there were no job opportunities," Shepperson said. "But there is a crisis in local industry right now for industrial mechanical technicians. Industries are begging for them. There are about 30 positions that pay in the \$40,000- to \$50,000-a-year range. If that's the case, we need to look to train people here.

"The committee (working on the scholarship program) wants to encourage people to come back to the area, too. Mr. Zogby said we should encourage students,

including the non-traditional student, to go back to school."

That's where the partnership's scholarship program comes in.

The committee is preparing to solicit local business and industry, not only for their employment needs, but for money to send people to school for the proper training.

Since the need for industrial mechanical technicians has been identified now, Shepperson said the committee is gearing itself to award a scholarship for that field in this first scholarship round, which will be made for the fall 2000 college semester.

She said the committee intends to offer the last year of a two-year program — or the last two years of a four-year program

— to students who are enrolled in a curriculum of local employment need.

Students must apply to the partnership to be considered for the scholarship.

Shepperson said she and Dr. John Madden, executive officer at the Penn State Hazleton Campus, have developed a "comprehensive application" that will be reviewed by a panel.

But the most important tasks at hand now are letting students — or perhaps prospective students — know the scholarship program exists, and getting corporate sponsors.

"We are making an effort through high school guidance counselors to make people aware of the opportunity," Shepperson

said.

Fortunately, she said, the business community is responding favorably to the scholarship idea.

"We need the strong support of business and industry to make this work," she said. "PP&L has taken the lead once again and made the first contribution. The committee will soon be visiting local business and industry requesting additional financial support."

Shepperson said she hopes that \$5,000 contribution by Pennsylvania Power & Light is the first of many to get the program off the ground.

"You never know how successful a venture like this will be until you put it out there to the public," she said.