

INESS

Program pays grads to stay

By JIM DINO
Staff Writer

There is \$6,000 in college scholarship money awaiting three people from the Hazleton area – provided they promise to work in the Hazleton area for three years after graduation.

The Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership's Scholarship Committee is again offering a two-year \$6,000 scholarship – \$3,000 a year – to students in courses of study that will lead to degrees for jobs available in the Hazleton area.

However, with just a month to go before the annual deadline to accept applications for the scholarships – May 1 – scholarship committee chairman Jack St. Pierre said there are no applicants.

So the committee is going to sit down and discuss expanding the fields of study that are scholarship-eligible.

The program was begun in 2001 as a way to stop the "brain drain" of young people in the area. At that time, some of the two-year programs which met a job need included industrial maintenance technician, manufacturing

technology, electronics technology, computer technology and industrial technology.

Four-year programs were computer engineering, manufacturing engineering and production technology.

Candidates must live within the boundaries of the Hazleton Area School District or Weatherly Area School District, must achieve a minimum 2.75 grade-point average, must demonstrate employability and the desire to satisfy local employer needs.

However, other Partnership members pointed out there are other occupations for which there is a need in Hazleton, aside from those already in the scholarship program – like health care.

"There is a need for radiology and nursing," said Jane Danish, of the Greater Hazleton Health Alliance. "There is a tremendous shortage in health care."

St. Pierre said the committee had already agreed to include the Tobyhanna Army Depot and its needs as part of the Hazleton area.

Bob Skulsky, the Partnership's executive director, and

St. Pierre agreed the committee will meet to examine and potentially revise the criteria soon.

In the meantime, St. Pierre said the deadline will probably be extended past May 1 this year, to give good candidates a chance to apply – especially after the criteria are changed, and other courses of study made eligible.

Skulsky believes another reason for the lack of applicants is that young people going to a trade school – which is also scholarship-eligible – or college are fearful they will not be able to find employment in the Hazleton area after graduation.

But Skulsky said the Partnership is kind in the terms they ask someone to pay back a scholarship, saying it "amounts to a loan," with a very low interest rate, the minimum payment is \$50 per month, and the student has ten years to pay it back.

For more information on the scholarship program, or to get a scholarship application, contact Skulsky at 453-1509, or on the Internet at www.hazletonchamber.org.