

Greater Hazelton Civic Partnership looking
for applications for scholarship program

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The Greater Hazleton Civic Partnership is looking for applications to its new scholarship program.

The new program - which gives scholarships to students in post-secondary education who promise to come back to the area and use their education for a few years - is accepting applications until Thursday.

More information can be obtained by calling the Partnership office at the Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce at 455-1508.

Jo-Ann Yannuzzi, the Partnership's executive director, said the applications will be reviewed in July, and awarded in time for the fall college semester.

Dr. Geraldine Shepperson, superintendent of schools in the Hazleton Area School District, said she and Dr. John Madden, campus executive officer at the Hazleton Campus of Penn State, 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.

Jack St. Pierre, chairman of the scholarship committee, knows the value of the scholarship. He's the retired head of Pocono PET, which is now known as Pretium Packaging, a manufacturer of PET plastic jars and bottles in the Humboldt Industrial Park.

St. Pierre said the Partnership's scholarship program is a good one.

"It was established primarily to entice young people to come back to Hazleton to start their careers after they are educated," St. Pierre said.

St. Pierre said the intention of the committee is to grant the first scholarship in time for the fall, 2000 semester. Then, each spring,

applications will be made available for the next scholarship award for the following fall.

The committee wants, St. Pierre said, to pay for one year's education of a two-year technical program.

But the scholarship recipient will have to make a commitment, too.

"We will offer the scholarship for the second year of a two-year program," he said. "The person receiving the scholarship will have to sign a contract with the partnership that he or she will come back to the area and work for a three-year period."

The scholarship committee's intention is to award one scholarship per year to a student in either a two-year or four year program in a field where there is a job demand.

The only catch is that the student - who must apply to be considered for the scholarship - must sign an agreement that they will agree to stay in the community and work at least three years after completing their education.

St. Pierre said there are a number of schools in the region that have such two-year educational programs, including Penn State, Luzerne County Community College, Johnson Technical Institute in Allentown and Penn College of Technology in Williamsport.

The first to be contacted will be members of the Hazleton Area School District's READY program, in which business and industry partners with the school district to provide educational programs to train workers for READY members' businesses. There are 15 businesses and industries in the READY program, St. Pierre said.

"READY trains people with skills to get a job or a better job," St. Pierre explained. "The first class is just finished. Most of the people in the class have been placed in a job."

St. Pierre is optimistic there are enough contributors to make the program a success.

"There are indications there are a good number of companies willing to support the scholarship program with financing," he said. "We are approaching contributors and asking them for a contribution of X dollars over a four- or five-year period."

PP&L is one of those companies.

Martha Herron, a member of the partnership who is PP&L's Hazleton area manager, said the grant program's is exactly in line with PP&L's community goals.

"One of PP&L's corporate goals is education, because children are our future, and the future workforce," Herron said. "We are committed to the Civic Partnership and its grass-roots movement to stop the brain drain this area is suffering from and set up a scholarship program."

Herron said PP&L wants to keep young people in the area, and realizes there must be job opportunities for them in order to keep them here.

"We saw an opportunity to contribute to another community need," she said. "We wanted to provide the money necessary for the scholarship program to keep young people in the community, but we must be able to offer them jobs in the community."

The scholarship committee has been talking with the business and industry community in the Hazleton area already, and has identified a need - industrial mechanical technicians. There are about 30 positions that pay in the \$40,000- to \$50,000-a-year range.

As superintendent of schools in

the Hazleton Area School District, Shepperson has watched products of the school district leave the area after college - because they said there are no job opportunities here for them.

But she said there are job opportunities here.

It's just a matter of marrying the job with a student that 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. 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."