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Top Business

Grant approved for job training

Program at ESF will train workers for high-paying, high-tech jobs.

January 07, 2004

By Rick Moriarty
Staff writer

A \$1.2 million federal grant will create a worker training program that officials say will help Central New York attract high-paying jobs in biotechnology, environmental systems and manufacturing.

The money from the U.S. Department of Labor will offset the cost of creating the program and will subsidize the tuition of 120 students over the next three years.

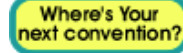
Professional certificate programs will be established at State University College of Environmental Science and Forestry in biotechnology, engineering design tools, renewable energy design and construction, and indoor environmental quality.

In announcing the grant Tuesday, officials said the training programs will be the first in the nation to focus on the four fields. By producing a supply of highly skilled workers, the program will help draw technology companies to Central New York and help existing ones grow, they said.

"We're looking to become a global leader in these areas," said Rep. James Walsh, R-Onondaga, who lobbied for the grant. "We're making major investments in these areas."

Cornelius B. Murphy Jr., president of the College of Environmental Science and Forestry, said the grant will provide "seed" money for what

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he hopes will grow into a much larger program serving 500 to 1,000 students over three years.

Details have yet to be 0

worked out, but Murphy said applicants for the tuition assistance program will likely apply to the Manufacturers Association of Central New York, which will promote the program and help develop it.

Half of the 120 students who receive tuition assistance will be sponsored by local technology companies, which will pay for a portion of their tuition.

The other 60 slots in the tuition assistance program will be reserved for unemployed workers.

Graduates of the program will be able to step into jobs with starting pay of \$75,000 to \$100,000 a year. Most, if not all, will have bachelor's degrees and possibly some graduate study before they enter the program, officials said.

The Syracuse-based program is the only one in New York to receive the federal money, which is part of a \$49 million federal effort to improve the job skills of American workers and discourage American companies from filling jobs with foreign workers.

The money comes from fees paid by companies that obtain special visas for highly skilled foreign workers to fill technology jobs in this country.

Randy Wolken, president of the Manufacturers Association of Central New York, said the recent recession in the manufacturing sector has masked what had been a shortage of skilled workers. But as the economy improves, those shortages will crop up again and companies will be moving to where they can find skilled employees, he said.

"The shortage in critical skills will be severe over the next five to 10 years," he said.

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