

Free training offered to job seekers

Prospective students can apply at new Opportunity Center

By H-P STAFF

BENTON HARBOR — The new Opportunity Center is offering free training to help Berrien County job seekers find jobs.

The center, a partnership between Michigan Works! and Heartland Alliance, offers career planning assistance, refresher courses in basic math and reading and vocational training for high-demand industries.

Prospective students can apply at the Michigan Works!

Service Center at 499 W. Main St. in downtown Benton Harbor. Applicants must be at least 18 years old and live in Berrien County.

A required orientation will be held on the first Thursday and Friday of each month, starting next week, from 9 a.m. to noon or 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. at the Opportunity Center in the Mercy Center building, 960 Agard Ave., Suite 180.

Call 926-2430 for more information.

Students will pursue one of four vocational tracks — construction, landscaping, hospitality or culinary arts.

The tracks were chosen based on local employer demand. “Labor market studies project

that over 42,000 new Berrien County jobs will be created within these industries in the next seven years,” Todd Gustafson, Michigan Works! executive director, said in a news release.

“If we don’t train our local workforce with the right skills, employers will be forced to recruit from outside of the area or move to another region entirely.”

Opportunity Center students will experience on-the-job training in addition to what they learn in the classroom.

Students who have not completed high school will be given an opportunity to earn their General Educational Development certificate.

“The balance of soft skills and hard skills training is what makes this program unique and effective” said Rose Hunt-Redd, director of Michigan operations of Heartland Alliance.

“It’s hard to teach someone to be a competent chef when they can’t calculate basic measurements. This program will cover all the bases and give people a chance to succeed in a fulfilling career.”

The Opportunity Center is funded by Michigan Works! Training will be provided by Heartland Alliance, a non-profit, service-based, human rights organization.

Program lengths range from two to 12 weeks, depending on the vocation.