

Open house will showcase Opportunity Center successes

BENTON HARBOR—The Illinois-based Heartland Alliance will show off the fruits of its first project in Michigan with an open house this month at the Opportunity Center in Benton Harbor.

The center was established last summer by Michigan Works! of Berrien-Cass-Van Buren and the Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights. Since then, some 600 Benton Harbor residents have taken part in free academic and vocational training, according to Rose Hunt-Redd, Opportunity Center director.

“Our students are eager to share their success stories with all their friends and neighbors,” she said.

The open house will be 3-5 p.m. July 25 at the center inside the Mercy Center building, 960 Agard St., Suite 180. Guests can tour the training facility, enjoy delicacies prepared by culinary arts students and meet graduates whose lives have been changed by the program, Hunt-Redd said.

Heartland Alliance, a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing the human rights of people threatened by pover-

ty or danger, provides staff and services at the Opportunity Center.

Sid Mohn, president of Heartland Alliance, said the job-readiness programs at the center are modeled after successful programs in the Chicago area.

The Opportunity Center is funded by Michigan Works! Todd Gustafson, executive director, said most of the job-seekers his offices serve are work-ready and just need help searching for jobs or sprucing up their resumes. But others need basic literacy skills and

have little work experience. The Opportunity Center has been a vital resource for moving chronically unemployed people into skilled applicants, Gustafson said.

Besides basic math and reading, the center offers vocational training in four tracks – construction, landscaping, hospitality and culinary arts. The tracks were chosen based on local employer demand and projected needs. Program lengths range from two to 12 weeks.

Anyone interested in attending the open house should call 926-2430.