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ABSTRACT

The Cutting Edge is a bimonthly newsletter of the Regional Center for Applied Technology and Training at Danville Community College (DCC) (Virginia) that provides the latest information on a wide range of issues including technology, business, employment trends, and new legislation. Articles from the first five issues discuss: (1) the July 2000 Workforce Investment Act (WIA), which replaces the Job Training Partnership Act and rewrites current federal statutes governing programs of job training, adult education and literacy, and vocational rehabilitation; (2) the first meeting of the Regional Center for Applied Technology and Training's Internet Incubator Alliance, which brought encouraging words to the Southern Virginia region from a leading Internet expert. Speaking to the 30 local business leaders who have joined the alliance, William Muir, Jr., Director of the Virginia Electronic Commerce Technology Center at Christopher Newport University, said that Danville and the Southern Virginia region offer great potential for new business-to-business electronic commerce opportunities; and (3) the new A+ certification courses offered by DCC's Regional Center for Applied Technology & Training. The A+ certification is a testing program sponsored by the Computing Technology Industry Association that certifies the competency of service technicians in the computer industry. (JA)

The Cutting Edge, 1999-2000

Volume 1, Numbers 1-5
November 1999-December 2000

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Welcome to THE CUTTING EDGE

As part of its industry outreach and partnering program, RCATT is establishing an on-line newsletter. This newsletter is designed to keep you abreast of the latest RCATT activities and to let you know how RCATT can help YOUR business.

RCATT welcomes feedback, input and--most importantly--involvement in all of its activities and programs, including this newsletter. If you have questions, comments, or information you would like included in this newsletter, or if you would like to add an e-mail address for newsletter distribution, please contact the RCATT office at 804-797-8516 or e-mail us at RCATT@dc.cc.va.us.

We hope you will find the information in this first newsletter useful and that we can continue to serve your needs through future newsletters and the many fabulous programs and business opportunities that RCATT is developing.

TOOLS FOR BUILDING A BETTER WORKFORCE

What if your company had a way to accurately predict which new hires would be more likely to quit shortly after training and which would still be around to receive long-term service awards? Or to identify which of your existing employees possessed the skills necessary to advance into more challenging positions and which were already over their heads and required more training?

Certainly there are no crystal balls available to employers, but a handful of companies are working on the next best thing: Worker assessment and job profiling programs.



These programs, which usually rely on written and computerized testing mechanisms, are the latest tools that businesses are using to help address workforce attrition and other industry concerns. Depending on the test administered, employers can identify everything from an employee's strengths and weaknesses in various technical skills to such traits as an employee's work ethic. Employees' scores are matched with scores developed for each job available within the company. Businesses are using these programs to strengthen their existing workforce and to identify the best potential candidates for their future staffing needs.

According to RCATT Executive Director Jim

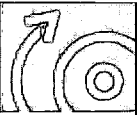
Johnson, profiling and assessment programs will play an integral role in the center's industry partnering efforts to strengthen the local workforce.

"One of our goals at RCATT is to help industries build the most viable workforce possible to meet their current and future needs," Johnson stated. "These programs have already made a significant impact at companies that have implemented them elsewhere. I'm confident we'll see similar success stories here in the Southern Virginia area."

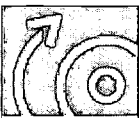
Johnson says that RCATT has been reviewing all existing assessment and profiling programs to determine which have the characteristics that will best meet the needs of local businesses. The center has recently narrowed their focus down to four programs for further study.

"Our next step will be to start meeting one-on-one with local industry to further assess each company's needs and fine-tune the elements of our assessment program," Johnson said. "We're really quite excited about the possibilities these programs offer. I think that our local businesses are going to be pretty excited, too, when they see how effective these programs are and how much money these programs can save them in terms of attrition and employee turnover."

For more information on employee assessment and job profiling programs, contact RCATT Executive Director Jim Johnson at 804-797-8516.



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RCATT

THE CUTTING EDGE

PROFILE AND ASSESSMENT WORKSHOP FOCUSES ON



As part of its efforts to implement an effective employee assessment and job profiling program, RCATT held a breakfast workshop on October 27 to explore the *WorkKeys* system.

Created by ACT (well known for its ACT college entrance exam), *WorkKeys* is a three-stage employability skills assessment tool designed to help employers ensure they have the right employees in the right positions. The *WorkKeys* program measures eight foundational workforce skills:

- ◆ Applied mathematics
- ◆ Applied technology
- ◆ Listening
- ◆ Locating information
- ◆ Observation
- ◆ Reading for information
- ◆ Teamwork
- ◆ Writing

The system measures the skills of employees (or potential employees) in those key areas for comparison with competency levels established for the performance of specific jobs.

The workshop featured three guest speakers, all of whom have had extensive experience implementing *WorkKeys* in the workforce.

Mac Macilroy, CEO of the Virginia Manufacturers Association, provided a comprehensive overview of how such programs work and detailed the need for implementing such programs to address the current and future employment challenges that Virginia industries are facing.

Jack Heslin, *WorkKeys* Practitioner for John Tyler Community College, provided details of a *WorkKeys* case study and gave attendees insight into how JTCC is using assessment programs to strengthen the labor force of its industry partners.

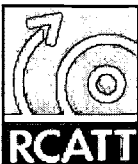
Jim Price, Project Leader, Goodyear Inc., shared the results of initial *WorkKeys* implementation at Goodyear. He explained that the company established three teams with two certified job profilers on each. The teams conducted profiles in Danville, Union City, and Topeka. Their initial focus has been on maintenance craft jobs (electrician, mechanic, and pipe fitter). The profilers developed a matrix of the profiled results and compared these results to population data gathered to establish selection criteria for the profiled jobs.

The speakers agreed that *WorkKeys* and similar assessment programs have been reaping tremendous results in helping employers build a stronger workforce. The payoffs these speakers cited were numerous, including improved employee selection processes, improved employee advancement processes, reduced overtime and turnover, increased productivity, fewer legal challenges over hiring processes, and higher employee morale.

Following the workshop, several of the 40-plus attendees stayed on to work with RCATT representatives on forming an HR team to address the issue of implementing a local assessment and profiling program through RCATT.

The team will hold open meetings on a monthly basis. Its next meeting will be held on December 8 at 11 a.m. at Shorewood Packaging in Danville's Airside Industrial Park. To ensure a proper headcount on lunches, please call 804-797-8516 if you are interested in attending.

The team's goal is to provide a program tailored to address employment problems specific to the Southern Virginia area and to meet the unique needs of local businesses. This goal can best be met, of course, by ensuring that all local businesses have a voice in this process. Therefore, RCATT is encouraging companies to designate a representative from their business to attend these meetings and to tell RCATT what their specific needs and employment challenges are.



LEAN MANUFACTURING INCREASES PROFITS AND PERFORMANCE

Would you like to:

- Reduce waste and increase flexibility?
- Slash inventory, balance workflow, and improve on-time delivery?
- Maximize your workforce by increasing productivity 30 to 70 percent?
- Improve communication between management and the shop floor?

RCATT and Virginia's A.L. Philpott Extension Partnership (VPMEP) will be hosting a Principles of Lean Manufacturing 101 workshop from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on December 2 at Danville Community College. Cost is \$195 per person (includes continental breakfast, lunch, and all conference materials) with a \$20 discount for three or more registrants.

Lean manufacturing is a systematic approach to identifying and eliminating waste through continuous improvement techniques. It is a proven methodology for analyzing and improving the flow of information and materials in a manufacturing environment, resulting in a dramatic increase in customer satisfaction, employee involvement, and company profitability.

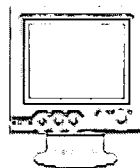
Geared to all levels of management, the workshop boasts an impressive track record of producing outstanding and quantifiable improvements at participating companies.

Workshop participants will gain valuable hands-on experience through manufacturing simulations that validate the lean manufacturing principles.

To sign up, call 1-800-MEP-4MFG or sign up online at www.vpmep.org. Registration and payment must be received by November 24.

Don't let your competitors get LEANER than you!!!

DOING BUSINESS ELECTRONICALLY IN SOUTHERN VIRGINIA



The information age has arrived! Every day more and more businesses and entrepreneurs are tapping into the vast commerce opportunities offered on the World Wide Web. Here's your chance to find out how to make this exciting new market work for you!

RCATT, in conjunction with the Danville Area Chamber of Commerce, Pittsylvania County Chamber of Commerce, and Halifax County Chamber of Commerce, will be jointly presenting an e-commerce dinner symposium the evening of January 25 in Oliver Hall on the DCC campus.

"Doing Business Electronically in Southern Virginia" is geared to address large industry and small businesses alike, as well as private entrepreneurs and individuals wanting to learn more about the exciting new business opportunities that exist on the net.

Learn from the experts:

- What types of e-commerce opportunities exist
- How e-commerce can be used in Southern Virginia
- How e-commerce can benefit your company
- How to manage a global business from your local area

Cost is \$25 per person (includes dinner and presentation). Seating is limited, so reserve your tickets early. Advance tickets are available from the RCATT office at 804-797-8516, or e-mail RCATT@dc.cc.va.us for more info.

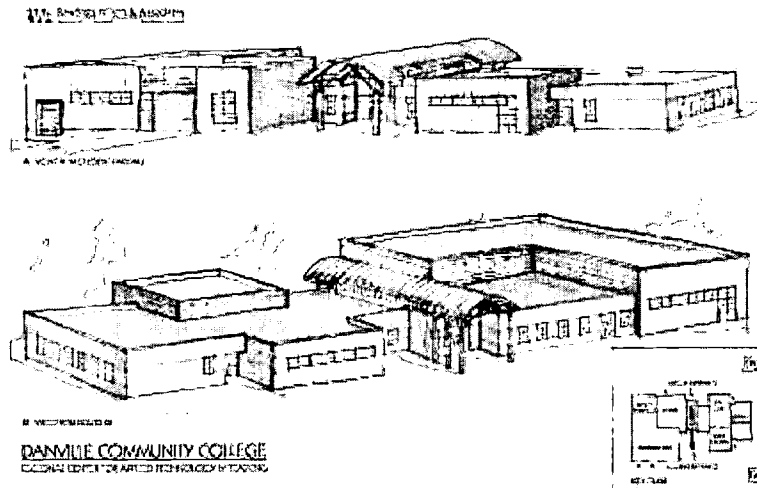
**Don't miss out
on this exciting new
business opportunity!!!!**



FULL STEAM AHEAD ON NEW RCATT FACILITY

The official ground-breaking ceremony for the new RCATT facility was held this past summer, and construction plans are progressing in an ambitious manner. The facility will be located at the Airside Industrial Park, located on U.S. Highway 58 in Danville.

When completed, the 24,000-square-foot building will include a high bay area for industrial training; a computer laboratory; a drafting, design, and engineering laboratory; several classrooms; and a distance-learning auditorium.



Architects' Rendering of new RCATT facility

In addition to use for RCATT's training and outreach/partnering programs, the facility will also be available for use by local industry for company-sponsored training and other types of programs.

The center will be both an asset to the area's existing industries and a beacon attracting new industries to the region.

Construction is expected to be completed in mid-2001.

In the meantime, RCATT has created a number of industry partnering programs and training opportunities to be hosted in alternate facilities until the new RCATT facility is completed.

LET US KNOW

Does your company have a specific training requirement? Are there any topics you would like to see addressed at upcoming training seminars and workshops? RCATT wants to hear from YOU! Please contact us at 804-797-8516 or RCATT@dc.cc.va.us and let us know about your interests and requirements.

And don't forget the RCATT web site at
www.dc.cc.va.us/RCATT/index.html

YOU CAN PARTICIPATE IN RCATT!

Learning Opportunities

- Industry-improvement conferences
- Technology transfer workshops
- Non-credit courses
- Customized company-specific training programs

Planning Teams

- Human Resources
- Information Technology
- Marketing/Public Relations
- Technology-Specific

Administration

- RCATT Board of Directors

RCATT BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Joe Acker - Hickson DanChem
- Mike Albright - Goodyear
- Greg Boozer - Dan River Inc.
- Judy Breznay - Corning Inc.
- Mattie Claiborne - Sprint
- Jerry Grubbs - Retired CEO
- Dale Hockel - Diebold Inc.
- John Mead - Master Gage & Tool Co.
- Ed Nugent - Intertape Polymer
- Carlyle Ramsey - Danville Community College
- Robert Sexton - Starmark Offshore

RCATT MISSION

RCATT's mission is to promote a more favorable business environment by providing high-quality educational programs and services designed to enhance the skills and productivity of the existing workforce and to aid in the development of the future workforce. To accomplish this, RCATT programs will be directed in five different areas of services to business:

- ◆ Provide skills assessment and job counseling for workers seeking retraining
- ◆ Deliver customized training to meet the needs of workforce development
- ◆ Assist workers to meet the requirements of industrial certification programs
- ◆ Explore and introduce new and emerging technologies to area businesses
- ◆ Develop partnerships with other organizations to provide comprehensive services that will enhance the productivity and competitiveness of area businesses.

RCATT is a business outreach service of Danville Community College.

RCATT
 1008 South Main Street
 Danville VA 24541
 804-797-8516 or 804-797-8560
rcatt@dc.cc.va.us
www.dc.cc.va.us/RCATT/index.html

E-Commerce Takes Southern Virginia By Storm!!

Symposium a Huge Success . . .

The massive snow storm that hit the East Coast in late January may have left many businesses wishing for better weather, but it didn't stop nearly 150 local business representatives from braving the icy roads and cold weather to learn about the latest marketing opportunity: E-commerce.

E-commerce is the term for doing business via the Internet. Many retailers are now offering web sites where consumers can buy products without ever having to leave their homes. In addition to retailing opportunities, e-commerce is catching on in an even bigger way among manufacturers who find the Internet a cost-efficient and convenient way to buy raw materials and supplies.

On February 1, the Regional Center for Applied Technology & Training hosted the e-commerce symposium, "Doing Business E-lectronically in Southern Virginia." Co-sponsoring the event were the Danville, Pittsylvania County, and Halifax County Chambers of Commerce, as well as Virginia's Center for Innovative Technology.

Featured speakers included Linda Green of Virginia's CIT, speaking on business-to-business e-commerce, and Dr. Andrew Cohill of Virginia Tech's Blacksburg Electronic Village, speaking on business-to-consumer e-commerce.

The event also included over 13 exhibitors. Several of the exhibitors represented companies that offered various products and services for helping businesses establish an on-line presence or expand their existing on-line capabilities. Other exhibitors were from on-line businesses that came to offer advice and share lessons they had learned when they first ventured into the world of on-line commerce.



(L to R) Dan Schaefer and Tim Bergeson of SPS Commerce from St. Paul, Minnesota, explain their company's business-to-business e-commerce services to David Dalton and William Phelps of Dimon, Inc., and Andy Straler of SunCom.



(L to R) Rick Barker of Evinco magazine and Bob Sexton of Starmark Offshore discuss e-commerce benefits with Halifax County businessman Carl Espy.

There was a lot to be learned at the symposium, but the overall message from speakers and exhibitors alike seemed to be that e-commerce is here to stay and the businesses that have the best chance for surviving and prospering in the future are those businesses that embrace this new technology.

And judging from the large turn-out of attendees, Southern Virginia business leaders proved that it's going to take more than a few inches of snow to dampen their enthusiasm for learning about new technologies.

In This Issue . . .

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- 8 Upcoming Events



Kimbanet owner John Wolchko (left) demonstrates his company's services to Bill Winter of the Virginia Electronic Commerce Technology Council.



(Left to right) Pittsylvania County Chamber of Commerce representative Judy Keesee helps Lacy Day and David Stephens of Riverside Hardware at the registration table.



The symposium also provided an enjoyable networking opportunity for (left to right) attendees Vince Decker, of the Longwood Small Business Center, and Mike Levy, of VPMEP.

NEW ON-LINE TRAINING PROGRAM OFFERS OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN ANYTIME, ANYPLACE

Gone are the days when training courses required a physical presence in a classroom. With the boom in on-line technology allowing everything from retail sales to gaming via the Internet, the latest spin-off is computer-based training — and the technology has now arrived in Southern Virginia!

In an announcement at the “Doing Business E-lectronically in Southern Virginia” symposium February 1, Jim Johnson, Executive Director of the Regional Center for Applied Technology & Training, unveiled the center’s new “Learning Unlimited” series. The program offers over 300 courses in various computer disciplines, all of which are taken on-line.

“We’re very excited about this new learning opportunity,” Johnson stated, “It opens up a whole new avenue for the citizens of our region to acquire valuable job skills.”

One of the most appealing aspects of these courses, according to Johnson, is the convenience.

“The Learning Unlimited program provides an opportunity to learn at any time and any place that is convenient for the student.”

“Students can take the courses at home or at work — anywhere they have Internet access. They will also be welcome to use the computers in DCC’s Learning Assistance Center. And because the coursework is all on-line, they can access it at any time of the day or night and progress through the course at their own speed.”

Stressing the ever-increasing importance of computer skills in the workplace, Johnson said he sees the program as a tremendous asset to employers seeking a convenient way to train their employees, as well as employees or job-seekers who want to strengthen their job skills and increase their chances for career advancement.

The program is geared to computer users of all levels of competency, from beginner to advanced. Course material ranges from word processing fundamentals to advanced network analysis and optimization, from basic database administration to expert multi-language programming skills. It includes all the current leading disciplines, including C++, Novell, Visual Basic, Oracle, SQL, Lotus, Java, and PERL, among others.

Students may take only one course to address a specific learning need, or they may take a series of courses to prepare themselves to take certification exams in various computer disciplines.

One of the series that Johnson predicts will be among the most popular is for A+. A+ is a certification program developed by the Computer Trade Industries Association, which includes most of the leading companies in the

computer industry. In a collaborative effort, CompTIA members created a list of skills that they consider to be the most essential for computer service and maintenance technicians. The association then created a test to validate these skills. Upon passing the test, students earn the title of being "A+ certified."

"An A+ certification is an incredibly valuable asset in today's job market," Johnson noted. "It's recognized by employers all over the world."

Most of the courses will cost only \$99. If the courses are taken as part of a certification preparation series, there will be additional discounts.

Another series that is expected to be quite popular is the Microsoft Office User Specialist series, also designed for certification preparation. This series includes training in each of Microsoft's leading products, including Microsoft Office, Word, Excel, Access, and Power Point. Students who pass this test earn the title of being "MOUS certified."



RCATT's Jim Johnson (right) explains RCATT's new Learning Unlimited program to (left to right) Regina Majied, Robert Marshall, and Sue Wickers, all of Danville.

In an effort to make the courses affordable for all students, Johnson said that most of the courses will cost only \$99. If the courses are taken as part of a certification preparation series, there will be additional discounts.

The cost of each course also includes access to DCC's Learning Assistance Center, as well as access to a course mentor, whom students can contact for help with their coursework.

Each course presents material that is equivalent to approximately 6 to 8 hours of classroom time.

"We're quite happy to offer this new way of learning," Johnson said. "We're anxious to begin enrolling students who are looking to increase their career opportunities and employers who want to increase the skill level within their workforce."

For more information about Learning Unlimited or to sign up for a course, call the RCATT office at 804-797-8516 or email RCATT@dc.cc.va.us.

Still Here to Help . . .

As more and more businesses look to the Internet to improve their sales and operations, competition is going to become increasingly challenging for those businesses who don't investigate what this new technology can do for them.

Even if you missed the "Doing Business Electronically in Southern Virginia" symposium, it doesn't mean your business has to be left in the dark ages. Check out the symposium exhibitors listed below and throughout this issue. They'll be happy to answer your questions about e-commerce and help you with your needs.

Clement & Wheatley

804-793-8200

Email: cwlaw@gamewood.net

Web Site: www.cwlaw.net

The law offices of Clement & Wheatley provide a model example of how e-commerce can be used in an office environment.

Evince Magazine

804-799-9647

Email: dwm@gamewood.net

Contact them for information on their new monthly Internet technology column, "Bit by Bit."

Gamewood Data Systems, Inc.

804-799-4611

Email: info@gamewood.net

Web Site: www.gamewood.net

Contact them for internet access, local network domains, commercial and personal web sites, e-commerce activities, and customized cold fusion-based programs.

Holiday Travel Service

804-799-0230

Email: travel1@gamewood.net

Web Site: www.htsvacation.com

Owner Gary Beyer was involved in setting up the business's web site in November 1999 and will be happy to share his experiences and lessons learned with other local businesses.

Internet Technology Innovation Center
703-277-7739

Email: vfrizzell@osfl.gmu.edu

Web Site: www.internettic.org

Contact them for the university-based research needed to accelerate the creation and deployment of your organization's network-based IT infrastructure.

Kimbanet

540-666-9209

Email: john@kimbanet.com

Web Site: www.kimbanet.com

Contact them for internet access, website design and hosting, e-commerce, and high speed wireless access, as well as network and Intranet design, sales, installation, and administration.

Hip Hip Software/MerchandiZer.Com

1-800-636-6343

Email: info@merchandizer.com

Web Site: www.hiphip.com and

www.merchandizer.com

Business-to-customer solution that combines real-time online or offline order processing, as well as web site design, hosting, marketing, maintenance, inventory analysis, site statistics, sales reports, and multi-language translation features.

Regional Center for Applied Technology & Training

804-797-8516

Email: RCATT@dc.cc.va.us

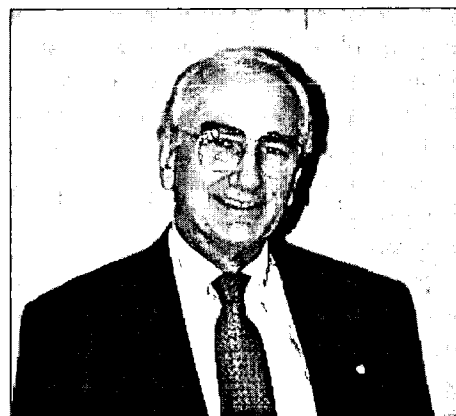
Web Site: www.dc.cc.va.us/RCATT/index.html

Contact them for employee assessment and job profiling, industry improvement conferences, job certification training, technology transfer workshops, customized company-specific training programs, on-line and distance-learning courses, and e-commerce referrals and advice.

One on One

The Cutting Edge Speaks with Dr. Carlyle Ramsey

The Regional Center for Applied Technology & Training has come a long way since it was first conceived in 1995.



In June, RCATT broke ground on a 24,000-square-foot training facility in Danville's Airside Industrial Park. In July, Mr. Jim Johnson was selected from a large field of applicants to serve as RCATT Executive Director. In August, RCATT established a dedicated working board of directors.

Over the past few months, the RCATT staff has been working vigorously to create a comprehensive industry outreach program to serve the current and future training needs of the Southern Virginia region. Their efforts have included task forces and studies, creation of new publications, and presentation of various training courses, workshops, and conferences.

As the team endeavors to continue building a strong program, the Cutting Edge staff thought the time was right to take a look back at RCATT's roots and review the goals and challenges RCATT will be tackling now and in the future. And what better way to do this than by sitting down for a one-on-one interview with Danville Community College President and RCATT Board Member Dr. B. Carlyle Ramsey?

As President of DCC, Dr. Ramsey is intimately familiar with RCATT, DCC's newest affiliated service. In addition, Dr. Ramsey was extensively involved in the initial efforts to create RCATT and has worked diligently with the founding team to make RCATT a reality.

Here is the first of a two-part interview series with Dr. Ramsey. Part Two of this series will conclude in Cutting Edge's May/June issue.

Cutting Edge: Could you tell us a little about the history of RCATT?—That is, how the idea to bring the opportunity to this area was born, and what course of action was taken to make it happen?

Dr. Ramsey: The idea of having a program and facility dedicated to short- and long-term technical skills training originated with Senator Charles Hawkins back in the 1995 timeframe. He'd been contacted by a number of employers — both large and small — in his district. These employers were feeling there was a real skills shortage. Manufacturing is becoming a much more technically oriented process these days, and that trend will certainly continue in the future. So these employers were concerned with their immediate as well as future needs regarding workforce skills. Charles began studying the situation further. He talked to a number of people about the problems and how we could improve training methods for current workers and better prepare future workers for highly skilled manufacturing jobs. After a number of meetings, it became obvious that there was definitely a very strong need.

Cutting Edge: What were some of the factors contributing to this situation?

Dr. Ramsey: There were numerous factors. For one thing, employers indicated that they were facing many upcoming retirements among some of their most highly skilled workers. That added to the problem. While area economic developers were touting the area as a large skilled work area, industries concluded the pool needed expanding. So it became quite obvious that the issue was also one of economic development. If we were promising specific skills capabilities to industry, we certainly had to deliver.

Cutting Edge: What was the next step in the process?

Dr. Ramsey: After determining that there was a problem, Senator Charles Hawkins concluded that there was a definite need for some type of skills center. Although a few people suggested the public schools do it, it was apparent the public schools were not really equipped to handle non-credit courses. So Senator Hawkins and others, including Delegate Whitt Clement, Ben Davenport, and Charles Majors, suggested that some local leaders make trips to various technical centers in other regions of the nation.

Cutting Edge: Who were some of the other players with whom Charles Hawkins was working on this?

Dr. Ramsey: There were several other people involved in this initial effort. They included Max Glass (of DCC's Center for Business, Industry and Government and Workforce Services) and Randy Arno (of the Weldon Cooper Center). Max and Randy developed a concept paper. Then State Senator, and now Congressman, Virgil Goode was very supportive of expanding non-credit training similar to a North Carolina model. He submitted a budget amendment to the General Assembly for funding non-credit courses in the 1996 session. While the plan was not approved, his proposal raised the public's awareness about the issue. Moreover, Virgil Goode's budget amendment and the concept paper de-

Southern Piedmont Technology Council
804-572-8228

Email: jhill@sptc.org

Web Site: www.sptc.org

SPTC provides companies a chance to learn about technologies being used by other industry members as well as local, state, and national legislative efforts.

SpaceWorks, Inc.

301-251-4136

Email: ecampbell@spaceworks.com

Web Site: www.spaceworks.com

Business-to-business e-commerce solution comprised of software, services, and partnerships to transform marketing, selling, and customer service operations.

SPS Commerce

651-603-4713

Email: dschaefer@spscommerce.com

Web Site: www.spscommerce.com

Business-to-business e-commerce to enable non-electronic vendors and suppliers compliance to business rules and electronic data interchange (EDI). Guarantees 100% of trading partners the ability to conduct all purchasing, invoicing, inventory management, UPC-coded shipping and more via the Internet.

**Virginia Electronic Commerce
Technology Center**

757-594-7092

Email: bwinter@seva.net

Web Site: www.seva.net

A non-profit center specializing in building electronic commerce business villages. Contact them for web page consulting/development/hosting; database construction/consulting; general e-commerce consulting; e-commerce training (see <http://ec.seva.net>).

**Virginia's Center
for Innovative Technology**

804-791-5376

Email: lgreen@cit.org

Web Site: www.cit.org

Working one-on-one with Virginia's technology companies, CIT offers business, technical, and financial assistance and resource location. Specialities include new technology development and commercialization, as well as developing e-business strategies and solutions.

WBTM/WAKG

804-793-4411

Email: wbtm@gamewood.net

Web Site: www.wakg.com and
www.wbtm1330.com

Contact them for a full range of Internet services, including links through their radio stations, to set up and maintenance of web pages.



(L to R) Joe and Jeri Hause of Vernon Hill ask Kim Clifton about DCC's courses in web designing.

veloped by Arno and Glass helped cement the effort in terms of putting the ideas into a cohesive plan.

Cutting Edge: When did the final legislation come about to make it a reality?

Dr. Ramsey: Senator Charles Hawkins and Delegate Whitt Clement took the issue to Richmond in the 1997 General Assembly session. Whitt and Charles began talking to other legislators and found considerable support for workforce funding. (By this time, Congressman Goode had moved on to the Congress of the United States.) In the 1997 General Assembly session, the HJR622 legislation was approved, which provided for a study of workforce services and developing a comprehensive plan for the Commonwealth.

Cutting Edge: It sounds like things really started moving in 1997.

Dr. Ramsey: They did. In fact, in May of 1997, a group visited the Haywood Advanced Technology Center in Waynesville, North Carolina. The group included staff from the House Appropriations Committee, Senate Finance Committee, Max, Randy, as well as Senator Hawkins, Delegate Clement, Ben Davenport, and me. The Haywood Center serves several North Carolina counties. It is an impressive operation, and was an extremely worthwhile trip. So the effort was gaining momentum.

Cutting Edge: How did these HJR622 initiatives fare in the legislature?

Dr. Ramsey: Extremely well. For example, all eight of the HJR622 recommendations were approved in the 1998 General Assembly session. Regarding the technical centers, there were originally three proposed — all dedicated to workforce training, of course. But the Danville area was not included. Eventually the Danville area was added to the mix, in part because our local leaders managed to obtain \$1 million in a private gift from the E. Stuart Grant Trust to match state funding.

Cutting Edge: So from then on, full steam ahead?

Dr. Ramsey: Yes. Dan River Inc. hosted a breakfast for area industry leaders in April, and we had our first RCATT advisory committee meeting in June of '98 at the Danville Regional Airport. Feasibility studies were conducted and completed in January of '99. And, of course, we broke ground the following June and employed Jim Johnson, the Executive Director, in July 1999.

Cutting Edge: You talk about advisors and planners touring similar industry outreach organizations during the conceptual stages of RCATT. What were some programs that most impressed the group?

Dr. Ramsey: We toured centers in various states — Bevill in Alabama, technical centers in Oklahoma, Hagerstown in Maryland, and, of course, Haywood in North Carolina. In every case, there was a fairly significant source of funding in terms of capital from the state as well as local levels. These were up-front commitments. The personnel associated with these centers were highly entrepreneurial, very marketing-oriented. In most cases, the centers were also extremely well equipped. They also had a very clear mission and focus. In addition, it appeared as though industry leaders had a very high regard for the centers.

Cutting Edge: Thinking back on the various centers you saw, which one pops into your head first in terms of your vision for RCATT?

Dr. Ramsey: There were so many excellent centers. Oklahoma had a very impressive system. The facilities (and equipment) were state-of-the-art; it was like walking into an advanced manufacturing operation. Everything was current and highly efficient. The labs simulated a manufacturing environment — everything from safety signage to operational areas, space definition, color schemes, walkways, etc. The staff and students whom we met were very enthusiastic.

Don't miss the Part Two conclusion to this interview series in The Cutting Edge's May/June issue, when Dr. Ramsey talks about RCATT's current and future industry outreach plans.

E-Commerce Facts

Business-to-consumer e-commerce sales reached over \$22 billion in 1999 and are expected to reach \$152 billion within the next 2 years!

Business-to-business e-commerce sales reached over \$103 billion in 1999 and are expected to reach \$815 billion within the next 2 years!

Corning Foundation Awards Grant to RCATT

The Corning Foundation recently awarded a \$5,000 grant to the Regional Center for Applied Technology and Training to be used for the dissemination of technical information. The funds will be used for publication of the Cutting Edge newsletter.

The Corning Foundation was established in 1952 to develop and administer projects in support of educational, cultural, community, and selected national organizations. To date, the foundation has contributed over \$78 million through its programs of giving. Resources are directed primarily toward initiatives that improve the quality of life in and near locations where Corning Incorporated is an active corporate citizen.

Corning's Danville plant opened in 1962 to manufacture VYCOR® tubing for use in lighting products. Today, the facility is a specialty glass plant, making over 40 advanced glasses to meet the demand of many high-technology applications. It employs approximately 250 production, engineering, and support personnel.



Accepting the grant check from Corning Plant Manager Judy Breznay are RCATT Executive Director Jim Johnson (left) and Danville Community College President Dr. B. Carlyle Ramsey.

Upcoming Events

Value Stream Mapping
May 4, 2000
8:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.
DCC campus - Wyatt 5

A value stream is all the actions required to bring a product through the manufacturing process. This course teaches how to map the current state of a product or process documenting both value-added and non-value-added activities. Participants learn how to eliminate waste in the system to improve the state of operations. Real company examples and case studies are presented. Participants also bring their own examples and create their own current and future state maps.

For information, contact Jim Johnson at RCATT, 804-797-8516, or Kelly Morrison at VPMEP, 800-MEP-4MFG.

Sponsored by Virginia's A. L. Philpott Manufacturing Extension Partnership (VPMEP) and DCC's Regional Center for Applied Technology and Training (RCATT).

The Cutting Edge is a publication of the Regional Center for Applied Technology & Training. The Cutting Edge welcomes feedback, ideas, and material for publication in this newsletter. To contact The Cutting Edge staff, email RCATT@dc.cc.va.us or call 804-797-8516.

The Cutting Edge is available on-line at RCATT's web site at <http://www.dc.cc.va.us/RCATT/index.html>

The Regional Center for Applied Technology & Training is a business outreach service of Danville Community College.

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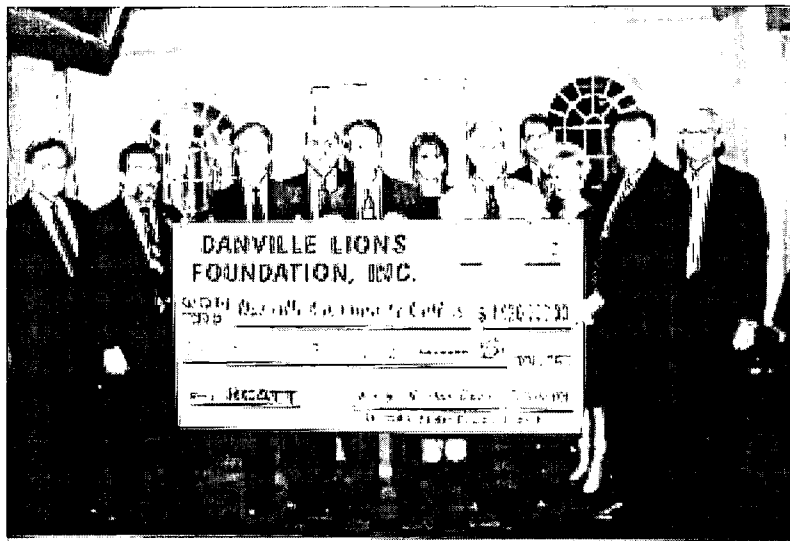
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Lions Gives \$1.15 Million to RCATT

Funds Will Support Building New Facility

The Danville Lions Foundation recently donated \$1.15 million to help with construction of RCATT's new Airside Industrial Park facility. In a March ceremony at the Stratford Inn, Lions Foundation President David Clarke presented the check, noting, "It's a benefit to the community and to the future." The donation will pay about one-third of the costs of RCATT's new 24,000-square-foot facility on U.S. Route 58.

Ground was broken on the project last summer, and construction is expected to be completed in late 2001. Funding for the donation was provided by the E. Stuart Grant Trust.



Pictured left to right are Virginia Delegate Whitt Clement, David Clarke (Danville Lions Foundation President), John Hall (Danville Lions Foundation Board and DCC Foundation Board Chairman), John Meade (RCATT Board), Jerry Buckner (Danville Lions Foundation Board), Judy Breznay (RCATT Board), Wayne Smith (Danville Lions Foundation Board), Jerry Grubbs (RCATT Board), Judy Keesee (RCATT Board), Jim Johnson (RCATT Executive Director), and Dr. Carlyle Ramsey (DCC President).

The donation will be used in conjunction with \$2 million that has been committed to the project by the Virginia General Assembly.

Virginia Delegate Whitt Clement, who was instrumental in getting the General Assembly to commit funds for the project, participated in the recent presentation. He noted that RCATT will play a crucial role in local economic development efforts and in helping retain and increase jobs in the Southern Virginia area.

In accepting the check, RCATT Executive Director Jim Johnson stated, "RCATT exists to help add value to our local businesses. If we're not adding value to your business, we're not doing our job." Johnson noted that the center is still seeking funding to help furnish the facility with state-of-the-art training equipment. The facility will include laboratories, training high bays, various classrooms, and a large auditorium equipped for group presentations and distance-learning opportunities. Upon completion, the facility will help RCATT increase its level of service to local industry, which includes employee assessment and job profiling, industry improvement conferences, job certification training, technology transfer workshops, customized company-specific training programs, and on-line and distance-learning courses.

In This Issue . . .

- 2 Online Procurement 3 Online Marketing 5 One on One 6 Training Benefits

Welcome Aboard

RCATT would like to welcome its newest staff member, **Janie Clark Davis**.

Ms. Davis has been hired to administer RCATT's employee assessment and job profiling program. Her responsibilities will include working one-on-one with local manufacturers and other businesses to assess the needs of their incumbent workforce as well as new hires. Using the assessments, Ms. Davis will work with clients to formulate training programs to increase the skill levels according to the varying needs of each company.

Janie brings more than twenty years of experience in human resources to the position. Her diverse background includes experience gained while working in the Carolinas for such textile companies as Burlington Industries, Reeves Industries, and Texfi Industries. She also worked with a major chemicals company formerly known as CIBA-GEIGY now known as Norvatis.

In addition to her HR experiences, Janie spent a short time recruiting potential bone marrow donors for leukemia patients.

Janie, a Pittsylvania County native is pleased to be living once again in the beautiful state of Virginia.

"No great thing is
created suddenly"

— Epictetus

Online Procurement Is Here and Growing Fast

Jerry Franklin for RCATT

Doing business on the Internet, naturally requires two parties: a buyer and a seller. Much has been written about the advantages of *selling* products and services via the Internet, but the flip side, i.e., *buying*, has not received much attention. And there definitely are advantages available to *buyers* when using the Internet to procure business materials and supplies.

B-Commerce and Due Diligence - Shorthand for business buying on the Internet is business-to-business e-commerce, sometimes referred to as "b-commerce". B-commerce is quite different than the retail, consumer-oriented e-commerce because purchases are usually of a recurring nature and, in today's enlightened business climate, the supplier is an integral partner in a business's "supply chain".

Modern business thinking considers the performance of suppliers to be as critical to the successful operation of a company as its own internal operating departments. Buyers must have competent suppliers because they are betting the company's operating results on them.

It is imperative that suppliers are qualified to provide products and services consistently over time. A competent buyer will investigate or "qualify" potential suppliers relative to their financial standing, delivery performance and quality record *before* placing the first order.

The Internet doesn't change this caveat. The Internet is just a tool to facilitate locating and working with good suppliers. All the old rules of doing business still apply. The business buyer must be concerned with issues of financial stability, delivery, and quality from their Internet suppliers, just as they are when dealing with suppliers found the old-fashioned way.

Fortunately, some b-commerce sites pre-qualify their listed suppliers before they are listed for use. Using such websites can provide an extra layer of security to the process. But all websites prominently contain disclaimers that the hosting site bears no liability for the performance of parties who choose to actually do business on their site. The responsibility of knowing whom you are dealing with still must fall to the transacting parties, both buyer and seller.

Online Markets - In the Brave New World of b-commerce, both buyer and seller are in an evolving relationship, testing the benefits and pitfalls this new technology provides. The online marketplace has a number of variations to link buyer with seller, including:



- Finding suppliers by searching for their websites
- Traditional auction format
- Shared procurement networks of buyers in a similar industry
- Independent market sites that attempt to pair buyers and sellers in a neutral arrangement where neither has an unfair advantage.

The following provides examples of the various market approaches:

- *Search Engines to find supplier websites:* Using search engines such as Yahoo, Excite, Altavista and Google, among others, buyers can find supplier web sites by typing in the appropriate keyword in the search box. As an aid, some sites will guide the buyer by a menu of choices to lead to the desired supplier. For example, Yahoo provides a series of links to lead to suppliers of specific materials such as chemicals, abrasives, cleaners, batteries, bearings, etc. http://dir.yahoo.com/Business_and_Economy/Companies/Industrial_Supplies/
- *Auctions:* Suppliers list available materials, and potential buyers bid for them in a traditional auction format. Online auctions are most often used for buying and selling surplus or salvaged items on a non-recurring basis. It is worth the time to check out a few auction sites periodically if you are in the market for small lots of surplus materials or equipment. Examples are industrydeals.com, gosam.com (a Greensboro, NC company), and Ebay.com.

The independent sites discussed below sometime also use variations on the traditional auction system.

- *Shared Networks:* In this buyer-driven arrangement, similar industries share information over a network to pool their buying power with the hope of stimulating competition among suppliers. An example of a shared network is the recent agreement by Ford, Chrysler, and Daimler Benz to form an online procurement network to pool procurement information and ask suppliers to bid for their business.

Auto companies hope that this pooling of buying power will influence supplier prices downward. However, such a marketplace may not be the best for the supplier because buyers can share proprietary market information among themselves without the supplier's knowledge. There is also some question of the legality of such an arrangement among competitors in the same industry.

Online Trading Communities (OTCs) can be built among cooperating companies and suppliers to provide a seamless link between company and supplier internal business systems. These communities are generally limited to Fortune 100 companies, since OTCs require extensive work and resources to set up and deploy. An example is www.iplanet.com.

- *Independent:* Industries and suppliers independently create a mutually beneficial marketplace on-line. This model is gaining favor among buyers and sellers and is more neutral than the shared model. Both buyer and seller have an equal say in the price of the transaction. Look for more of these types of arrangements to flourish within industries and product subcategories. Examples include:

Marketing Strategies in Plain English

So you say you've got a good product. Your plant is operating efficiently and you're enjoying good sales. You're savvy to industry production dynamics, and you pride yourself on keeping abreast of the latest technologies in the production arena. But what about the marketing arena?

Believe it or not, marketing technologies and strategies are changing at warp speed, too. And just as it's important to take advantage of the latest production opportunities, experts predict that the race will also go to those who can keep up with the pace of new marketing opportunities.

Find out for yourself. On **Wednesday, May 17**, RCATT will host an exciting luncheon learning workshop from **11 a.m. to 2 p.m.** at the Danville Howard Johnsons to help area manufacturers learn how to harness the marketing power of the Internet — simply and effectively.

“Developing an Effective Manufacturing Web Presence,” featuring Anne Richardson, President of Channel Marketing in Richmond, will help you master the essential elements for web site success.

Ms. Richardson combines a wealth of marketing knowledge, including experience in the White House and at a major New York marketing firm, to create a learning session that she promises will be “in plain English, not techno-jargon.”

Tickets are \$15 (includes lunch) and are available from RCATT at 804-797-8516 or RCATT@dc.cc.va.us.



“Anyone who stops learning is old, whether twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young.”

— Henry Ford

Working Together

RCATT Executive Director Jim Johnson was recently named to serve on Virginia’s Center for Innovative Technology’s (CIT’s) High Performance Manufacturing Steering Committee.

Comprised of various leaders in the manufacturing sector, the committee works to implement strategic plans to lay the groundwork for Virginia’s technology future.

“It’s a good fit to have RCATT involved in and supporting this committee,” Johnson stated. “RCATT has a lot to contribute to the effort, and I think that RCATT also has a lot to gain through such partnerships.”

www.mro.com, a site for purchasing maintenance, repair, and operating supplies. This site is an example of an independent supplier site that aggregates member’s purchasing needs, pre-qualifies suppliers in the network, and negotiates best price. Buyers search customized online catalogs. Rank-and-file employees may make purchases directly online with proper approval from a designated in-house authority. This saves in-house requisition paperwork as well as the more highly skilled buyer’s labor.

www.pointspeed.com, a site for small and mid-sized businesses to purchase office, computer and maintenance products, insurance, telecommunications, and travel services.

www.works.com, another independent site that provides a neutral marketplace for buyers and sellers to purchase office supplies, furniture, cell phones, and computer products.

www.suppliermarket.com, a site specifically for manufacturing. Buyers issue online RFQs, which are posted to an internal bulletin board where pre-qualified suppliers bid for the business.

Online procurement is growing exponentially. Forrester Research predicts that b-commerce will be a \$1.3 trillion market by 2003. No one knows just how large the potential market will actually be, but the trend is certainly important.

There is a tremendous rush to gain a foothold in the b-commerce market, by both suppliers and buyers (your competitors). Online procurement is estimated to yield 5 percent to 20 percent reductions in total purchased costs over traditional purchasing processes. As systems are perfected and a critical mass of participants becomes a reality, b-commerce is likely to meet or exceed these lofty projections.

To ignore the cost advantages available in this new marketplace is like leaving money on the table in a poker game. In order to play the game in the next century, you’ll have to master the skills of procuring on the Internet.

RCATT is dedicated to ensuring that all Southern Virginia businesses are able to reap the benefits of b-commerce. Look for upcoming RCATT-sponsored workshops and other exciting learning opportunities.

First Quarter 2000

- 4.1 percent national unemployment rate
- Average hourly earnings rose 0.4 percent
- Job creation was strongest in the service sector, while manufacturing lost approx. 5,000 jobs
- Pool of available labor rose 1.2 percent to 10.3 million

Adams Business News

One on One

The Cutting Edge Speaks with Dr. Carlyle Ramsey



Editor's Note: In the last issue of The Cutting Edge, DCC President Dr. B. Carlyle Ramsey spoke on the history of RCATT--how it got to where it is today. In this Part 2 Conclusion to his interview, Dr. Ramsey shares his visions for RCATT's future.

Cutting Edge: Based on your experience with the need for our local center and its development to actually becoming a reality, what is your overall vision for RCATT in terms of how it can benefit industry and businesses in southern Virginia?

DR. RAMSEY: Obviously, its mission must concentrate on improving the workforce, and I believe the focus should be heavily on manufacturing. Since forty percent of the area's workforce is in the manufacturing sector, our manufacturing base is one of our greatest assets.

Cutting Edge: So manufacturing should be its primary focus?

DR. RAMSEY: Yes, with a heavy emphasis on non-credit, customized training. I'm one of those people who passionately dislikes duplication of effort, especially when resources are limited and finite. The need exists in the manufacturing arena, so we must focus on where the need is the greatest and where there are fewer services or resources already available.

Cutting Edge: How will RCATT's affiliation with DCC benefit RCATT in achieving its mission and reaching its goals?

DR. RAMSEY: One community in the state tried to establish an advanced manufacturing technology center that was stand-alone. It was not financially viable. The key to success for a center like this is having a predictable, steady funding stream and an affiliation with a system that works. The community college system provides a steady funding stream and is a system that responds to the needs of our employers.

Cutting Edge: And how can RCATT contribute to DCC in terms of helping DCC reach its goals?

DR. RAMSEY: RCATT gives DCC an additional dimension for focusing on workforce training and development. DCC already has excellent technical training programs. For example, our machining and electronics programs would rival any to

Internet Technology Conference Offers High-Tech Business Info

The Internet Technology Innovation Center (Internet TIC) will host its second annual conference, "Entering, Leveraging, and Exploiting E-Commerce Opportunities in the Business World," September 19 - 21 at the Williamsburg Marriott.

The Virginia Internet Technology Conference 2000 (see <http://www.vitconference.org/>) will offer keynote presentations, professional development seminars, and networking opportunities. Topics will include infrastructure, security, data protection and recovery, Internet marketing, business-to-business e-commerce, intellectual property issues, venture capital opportunities, and the legal aspects of e-commerce.

"Virginia offers Internet companies a sophisticated infrastructure of support, enabling rapid growth that translates into a significant competitive advantage," says Virgil Frizzell, Internet TIC's director for industry and university collaboration. "The Internet TIC is continually working with small and large businesses throughout the Commonwealth to innovate and improve on today's Internet technology. Hosting events such as VIT Conference 2000 provides a forum for entrepreneurs, researchers, venture capitalists, managers, and others involved in the Internet technology to discuss the future of this e-commerce explosion."

For more information on the Internet TIC, visit <http://www.InternetTIC.org> or contact Virgil Frizzell at vfrizzel@osf1.gmu.edu.

Training Reaps Profits

Two recent studies of corporate training programs found that investing in workplace learning can reap dramatic improvements to a company's bottom line.

In a 2-year study by the American Society for Training and Development, training expenditures from over 500 companies were compared. Participants were broken into groups of high investors (average of \$900 per year per employee) and low investors (average of \$275 per year per employee). In comparing the performance of companies in the two groups, the study found that the high investors achieved:

- 57 percent higher net sales per employee
- 37 percent higher gross profits per employee

Similarly, a study by Mastering Computers found that company certification programs provide cost savings and greater efficiencies.

The study also found that hiring certified workers or paying for certification training improves employee retention by nearly 50 percent.

"In our research on certification, we have found that companies can save more than \$13,000 annually per certified employee due to increased efficiencies and less down time," said Ellen Julian, analyst for International Data Corporation, which participated in the study.

cite just two. But we haven't focused enough on highly specialized technical training. RCATT provides a way for us to move to a higher level in closing the skills gap.

Cutting Edge: DCC does have some very successful training programs. And in terms of industry outreach and workforce development, the C-BIG program has made impressive strides as well. What will RCATT add to the equation?

DR. RAMSEY: C-BIG has experienced a great deal of success and will continue to. But C-BIG does not have the specialized facility that is needed for an effort like this. The very name 'Regional Center for Applied Technology & Training' makes its mission undeniable. In the past, real-time requirements required juggling things around and making special provisions for some classes. This new facility will be dedicated to short-term training. RCATT will enable the college to achieve a higher level of training. It can also be a real economic development asset.

Cutting Edge: What type of cooperative effort do you envision between RCATT and C-BIG so that both programs complement each other's efforts to provide an even wider range of services for this area? Are we talking about a partnership between the two programs?

DR. RAMSEY: It's not so much like a partnership. I would say that the two will work together more like an integrated workforce system where each unit complements the other.

Cutting Edge: Having worked closely with local industry for many years, you have a good pulse on the strengths and weaknesses of the southern Virginia business climate. What do you see as the major strengths of businesses in this region?

DR. RAMSEY: First, our industry base is becoming increasingly diversified. At one time, it was pretty much textiles, tobacco, and wood products. We're now seeing a more diverse manufacturing base. Secondly, our local industries are good corporate citizens. For example, Goodyear has its golf tournament, Dan River has been very supportive of the college over the years. A number of other industries provide support for scholarships, equipment, and other needs. Generally speaking, the industries in our region are very committed to supporting the needs of our community.

Cutting Edge: In your opinion, what are the major advantages this area offers for businesses that locate here?

DR. RAMSEY: We are blessed with an ample supply of water, which is vitally important if water is essential to your manufacturing operations. Good recreational opportunities abound. We have access to large cities, airports, and some of the top medical centers in the world. We have a reasonably good transportation network, an excellent quality of life, and a low cost of living. Our workforce has traditionally had a good work ethic. Of course I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the presence of an excellent community college and four-year colleges in the area.

Cutting Edge: What do you see as being among the greatest challenges facing businesses

in our area? And how do you feel that RCATT can help businesses address these challenges?

DR. RAMSEY: One of the biggest challenges is the workforce issue. We're certainly not unique here with our region. We have a history of higher drop-out rates, so it presents us with a greater challenge. The nature of our economy did not require advanced skills. Thus, there has been less of an emphasis on advanced education. However, fewer people are farming now and manufacturing operations are becoming more technologically advanced, so we now face the challenge of closing a skills gap. RCATT will fill that immediate need for incumbent workers and will play an important role in helping improve the skills of people coming through the pipeline. We'll develop summer technical academies and start working to give high school students a chance to begin acquiring technical skills from 10th grade on. This college has exported a tremendous number of talented, skilled technicians over the years to other areas. We hope to train a larger pool of skilled people and retain them in this area so they can apply their skills in local industry.

Cutting Edge: Certainly any new organization faces constant funding challenges. But beyond that, what do you see as the biggest challenge RCATT faces in terms of the fact that it is a new program?

DR. RAMSEY: The fact that it's something new and different might be confusing to some people. And we're still refining our direction and our goals. Yet, the opportunities for making a difference far outweigh any perceived problems. The bottom line is that we are here to meet an unmet need, and that unmet need is, quite simply, vastly expanding the capacity of the region's workforce. That's why I said earlier that it's important that we don't duplicate the efforts of others, but rather to find that special niche. And even though our facility is not yet complete, we're filling unmet needs. We're holding training classes, seminars, and workshops. The 'Doing Business E-lectronically in Southern Virginia' symposium was a good example of an unmet need. E-commerce is a timely topic and businesses need that information; I am pleased we are collaborating with CIT and the Philpott Partnership. RCATT is already making a difference.

Cutting Edge: Where do you see RCATT one to two years from now?

DR. RAMSEY: Hopefully the facility will be open, operating, and fully staffed a year from now. Two years? By then RCATT will be gaining greater visibility and stronger credibility, generating excitement about the work it's doing.

Cutting Edge: Where do you see RCATT ten years from now?

DR. RAMSEY: By that time, RCATT will have contributed substantially to the economic development of our region. We will be recognized throughout the state and nation as an area that is known for its highly productive workforce. In other words, I'm very excited about the impact that RCATT will have on this region. It's going to be a tremendous asset!

Computer Skills are Only a Click Away!

RCATT is pleased to announce that its exciting new Internet-based training (IBT) program — *Learning Unlimited* — is up and running and offering “unlimited” learning opportunities.

With over 300 courses, *Learning Unlimited* offers students the ability to learn various computer skills on their own time at their own pace. For employers, it offers a convenient, affordable, and effective way to upgrade workforce skill levels.

Why are computer skills important in jobs that currently don't require such skills? The Department of Commerce estimates that within the next 10 years, nearly 90 percent of U.S. jobs will require computer literacy — including jobs that today do not require such skills.

For more info (or to “test drive” a course), visit the “On-Line Courses” section on RCATT's web site at www.dc.cc.va.us/RCATT/index.html.

“I would rather train someone and lose them, than not train them and keep them.”
—Zig Ziglar

Upcoming Events

Value Stream Mapping

May 4, 2000

8:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Oliver Hall - Temple Building

Sponsored by RCATT and

Virginia's A.L. Philpott Manufacturing Extension
Partnership

Developing an Effective Manufacturing Web Presence

A Luncheon Learning Workshop

May 17, 2000

11:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Howard Johnsons, Danville

Sponsored by RCATT

(further info on page 3)

For tickets, contact RCATT at 804-797-8516 or
RCATT@dc.cc.va.us.

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Danville Doctor Provides High-Tech Health Care Solutions

It's 7:15 on a Friday night and you're visiting your Aunt Mary. She is worried about her "potassium medicine." She is out of the medicine and has lost the bottle. You call her doctor's office and they put you through to the doctor on call, who does not know Aunt Mary. Neither you nor Aunt Mary nor the covering physician realize that Aunt Mary's "potassium medicine" is not the supplemental variety more commonly prescribed, but a life-saving medication to lower her potassium because of a chronic kidney condition.

An emergency in the making? Not in this case because the covering physician has access to the Gamewood Healthcare Network. He logs onto the system, pulls up Aunt Mary's medical record, and within seconds has access to all he needs to know.

Conceived and developed in 1996 by Danville nephrologist Franklin Maddux, the Gamewood Healthcare Network has been making big waves in the healthcare community. The system uses state-of-the-art web-based technologies to provide comprehensive healthcare communications and medical management services.

To date, the system has logged over 225,000 patient visit records, as well as a staggering 1.25 million lab tests (including digital X-ray images).

...Gamewood Healthcare Network, Inc., will begin courting the financial markets to complete funding of its next round of expansion that will dramatically enlarge the footprint of the network on the healthcare marketplace.

And the waves will soon be getting even bigger. This month, the company plans to spin off from its parent company, Gamewood Data Systems, to become a separate corporation. In August, the new company, Gamewood Healthcare Network, Inc., will begin courting the financial markets to complete funding of its next round of expansion that will dramatically enlarge the footprint of the network on the healthcare marketplace.

Prior to the creation of the new company, the system has been operating as a business-to-business prototype site. Features include a vast array of applications in medical office communication, medical record keeping, and business functions and reporting. In addition to early adopting medical practices that subscribe to the site's services, there are also a few non-healthcare subscribers who use it for business applications.

Dr. Maddux is certainly not new to the world of Internet applications. In 1993, he and his wife, nephrologist Dugan Maddux, started Gamewood Data Systems, an Internet service provider (ISP) in Danville that today is one of the largest local service providers in the Southern Virginia region.

In 1994, they went online with RenalNet (www.renalnet.org), a cyberspace clearinghouse to



Danville nephrologist Franklin Maddux discusses the Gamewood Healthcare Network at a recent medical conference.

In This Issue . . .

2 E-Signatures

4 Virginia's Labor Statistics

6 Older Workers

Push a Button, Sign Your Name

The House and Senate in mid June passed a bill that will legalize “e-signatures” — that is, signatures created and transmitted via the Internet.

The legislation will enable consumers to complete many transactions that in the past have required a written signature, such as obtaining a mortgage or buying life insurance.

Proponents of the bill say the change will save industry hundreds of millions of dollars by eliminating the mountains of paperwork and postal or courier costs that arise out of contractual deals between businesses. In addition, the new process is expected to significantly decrease the amount of time traditionally required for completion of business deals and will streamline the relationship between buyers and suppliers.

The law mandates that e-signatures require at least two clicks of a computer mouse in order for the signatures to be considered valid.

Various on-line technologies have been developed for this application. In some applications, for example, the user is issued a small online computer file containing a security code for the digital signature. In another, the user is issued a credit card-sized “smart card” that, when inserted into the computer, provides the security code to produce an authentic e-signature.

Applauding the move, a supportive President Clinton said, “It will encourage the information technology revolution that has helped lower inflation, raise productivity, and spur new research and development.”

provide multi-source healthcare, transplantation, and dialysis information to people suffering from end-stage renal disease. At the time, there were no more than 35 electronic kidney disease-related resources to catalog. As one of the first medical web sites, RenalNet was considered to be such a cutting-edge application of technology that it won more than a dozen awards and was conceptually repositied in the permanent collection of the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History.

Maddux’s most recent online accomplishment, establishment of the Gamewood Healthcare Network, is a reflection of his desire to not only help improve the operational efficiency and capabilities of medical practices in general, but to also help reduce the expensive information technology overhead costs.

“At our medical practice, the Danville Urologic Clinic, the network has reduced the number of in-house transcription employees and enabled the use of home-based contractors for numerous other support services at a cost savings to the practice,” Maddux said.

Regarding how the system streamlines the transcription process, Maddux explained:

“The way the process traditionally works is that the physician would see the patient and dictate his or her notes into a dictation system. Those dictations, usually tapes, were then carried to the transcription area where they were later typed in draft form. The drafts were subsequently carried to the physician for editing. Once they were reviewed and edited, the documents were returned to the transcriptionist. Final changes would be made and then again carried to the physician. If nothing else needed changing, the physician would sign the document. It would then be transported to the medical records department for filing, with copies sent to whoever needed them. In the old process, the notes spent a lot of time in in-boxes waiting for the next step to occur. In the new process, the transcriptionist enters the dictation directly into the system. Once complete, a reminder message appears on the physician’s screen highlighting that the records are ready for review and signing. The physician makes any necessary edits, and signs off right there from wherever he or she is logged on — the office, the hospital, even while on travel. The system then sends a copy directly to the medical records department. By cutting out four of the traditional seven steps, you’re realizing a time savings of probably 75 percent and reducing the paper shuffling dramatically.”

In addition to streamlining the transcription process, additional features include:

- Patient File Archives - Physicians can review a patient’s complete history, from lab reports, to medications, to nutritional assessments, to insurance information.
- Policy and Procedure Documentation and Meeting Minute Archives - When physicians need to review practice-specific information, it’s only a click away. And meeting minutes are reviewed and signed off in a manner similar to the transcription process, with online reminders.

- **Online Conferencing** - The web-based conferencing system notifies users by email when new topics are added for discussion and allows any group or sub-group within an organization access to their own conference room.
- **Address Book and Rolodex** - This feature is useful in keeping physical and email addresses synchronized when changes are made.
- **Personal Customization** - Users can integrate the Gamewood Healthcare Network with other web-based tools or systems and control the links offered to them from their individualized home page.
- **E/M Compliance Tool** - An auditing function that assists the organization in maintaining compliance with Medicare regulations.

Specialized functions enable users to combine data to create helpful charts and graphs. For example, a user might want to study the trends of a patient's progress in a specific area or to review the organization's productivity in various tasks.

"The network comes with all the features necessary to keep a healthcare practice well-organized and running efficiently. We want to make patients' lives better by assisting their healthcare providers in making more informed decisions through improved communications," Maddux said.

Another goal, according to Maddux, is to ensure value for users. The current business plan-pricing model is \$20 per month for each user within an organization. Compare that to non-online packages, which typically cost \$40,000 to \$60,000 and up for equipment, software licenses, plus several thousands of dollars per year for maintenance and training.

Although the system currently is set up for password-protected secure access for healthcare practice use only, Maddux says that he does envision the day when patient-specific features will be added. Patients might, for example, be able to schedule appointments, review their test results, request prescription refills, and ask their physician questions — all online.

"There's really no limit to the practical applications of this system," Maddux stated. "Everything in the online world is future-driven. If there's a clearly defined need, somebody will find a solution. The more that technology advances, the more solutions we'll develop. That's what the Gamewood Healthcare Network is all about — practical solutions to improve healthcare."

Gamewood
Healthcare Network

E-Learning Gains Momentum

RCATT is pleased to report that its Internet-based "Learning Unlimited" training program is up and running and has been receiving a favorable number of students enrolling from regional businesses.

The many benefits include:

- **AFFORDABLE RATES** -- \$75 per course with multiple course or student discounts
- **CONVENIENT LEARNING PLAN** -- Students can learn at their own pace anywhere they have Internet access
- **STATE-OF-THE-ART TRAINING** -- With more and more employers choosing Internet-Based Training (IBT), the technology is the wave of the future
- **EXTENSIVE COURSE SELECTION** -- Over 300 computer courses to choose from at varying skill levels
- **EASY ENROLLMENT** -- Sign up online at <http://www.dc.cc.va.us/RCATT/netcourses/netindex.html> or call RCATT at 804-797-8516.

"If you tell me, I will listen.
If you show me, I will see.
If you let me experience, I
will learn."

— Lau Tzu

Workforce Investment Act

On July 1, 2000, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) replaces the Job Training Partnership Act.

Signed into law on August 7, 1998, the WIA rewrites current federal statutes governing programs of job training, adult education and literacy, and vocational rehabilitation, replacing them with streamlined and more flexible components of workforce development systems.

Virginia's Labor Statistics

The following figures represent a quick look at Virginia's labor statistics, comparing April 1999 with April 2000.

Employment (in thousands):

Manufacturing:

394.9 (2000) 390.5 (1999)

Transportation & Public Utilities:

183.5 (2000) 175.2 (1999)

Wholesale & Retail Trade:

748.1 (2000) 737.6 (1999)

Financial, Insurance, Real Estate:

185.9 (2000) 182.4 (1999)

Services:

1,120.0 (2000) 1,078.8 (1999)

Manufacturing Average Hourly Earnings:

\$13.70 (2000) \$13.23 (1999)

Manufacturing Average Weekly Hours:

42.6 (2000) 42.2 (1999)

Bureau of Labor Statistics

Workers More Productive From Home

It's 8 a.m., and you're feeling fresh, energized, and ready to tackle the day. You sit down at your desk, flip on your computer, and roll up the sleeves of your pajamas. Pajamas?! Is this one of those bad dreams from which you won't awake until you've had to suffer an eternity of thundering guffaws from your coworkers? Nope, it's called "telecommuting," and it's the latest trend in the business world.

The concept of telecommuting is a direct product of the Information Age. With the advent of cellular phones, fax machines, home computers, and pagers — all now available at easily affordable prices — in many cases it is no longer necessary for employees to show up at the office or plant to perform their jobs, attend meetings, and stay in close touch with their customers, coworkers, and management.

While there are many employers who still feel that an employee cannot work from remote locations, a recent study by Olsten Center found that 51 percent of U.S. companies now permit employees to work at home, and 74 percent expect telecommuting to increase this year. A full 10 percent of U.S. adults now perform some of their paid work from home or other remote locations. This brings the number of telecommuters to over 20 million, and that figure is expected to jump to 30 million within the next 3 years.

Those companies who do permit telecommuting can expect to reap tremendous benefits, according to a study performed by AT&T in August and September 1999 that looked at randomly selected U.S. companies. The study found that employers can save 63 percent (or \$2,086 per employee per year) of the cost of absenteeism per telecommuting employee. Companies can realize replacement cost avoidance of \$7,920 per telecommuter. The study also found that telecommuters average a 22 percent higher productivity level than traditional on-site workers. Based on the average employee wage of study participants, these all add up to a company savings of \$10,006 per year per telecommuter.

The findings make clear sense when you consider the attributes of telecommuting. When telecommuters fall ill, they are less apt to call in sick because they don't have to worry about carrying germs in to the office or whether or not they'll be able to make it through the workday. Further, telecommuters are able to work, on average, one-half day after completing personal and child-related tasks that would ordinarily require them to take an entire day off work.

In terms of replacement cost avoidance, telecommuters are far less apt to switch employers than on-site workers. Why should they?—They have an ideal work environment.

And productivity? Anybody who has ever had to carry work home from the office knows which environment is most conducive to actually getting the work done. Telecommuters avoid the constant interruptions from

coworkers stopping by to chat; the distractions of ringing phones, cubicle chatter, and other environmental noise; and the temptation of office birthday celebrations and similar activities. Further, while office workers have to take time driving in to work, preparing to start their workday once they arrive, leaving for lunch, and then putting work away and preparing to leave at the end of the workday, most telecommuters are able to work straight through.

In addition to the cost savings areas looked at in the AT&T study, employers save additional expenses in other areas as well. For example, a company that has half of its workforce telecommute one day a week cuts down by 10 percent the need for offices, desks and chairs, bathrooms, copy machines, parking spaces, and heating and lighting.

It's not just savvy employers who have recognized the benefits of telecommuting. Lawmakers have started to take notice as well. In October, Congress passed the Department of Transportation and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2000. Buried inside the legislation is the National Telecommuting and Air Quality Act. This act gives companies clean-air pollution credits if they allow employees to work from home. Rep. Frank R. Wolf (R-VA) introduced the measure.

In November, Congressman Mark Udall (D-CO) introduced the Small Business Telecommuting Act, a bill designed to raise the awareness about telecommuting among small business employers and to encourage employers to offer telecommuting options to their employees.

Despite the benefits, many employers, however, are still reluctant to try telecommuting. One reason is that they are not sure which jobs would be a good match for telecommuting and which wouldn't. Some jobs — such as manufacturing work in an assembly-line type of environment — would obviously be impossible to convert to telecommuting. Others — such as writing and computer data entry — are easily recognizable candidates. But there are many less obvious positions that progressive companies are finding to be ideal matches for this new employment option. A recent search conducted at an online employment service, using "telecommuting" as the key word, yielded openings for hundreds of positions, from computer programmers to QA supervisors to Human Resource directors to engineers. So as far as telecommuting positions go, the options are endless.

Another obstacle to implementing telecommuting is that some employers — particularly those from what might be called the "old-school" philosophy — are just not comfortable with the new idea. One of their most vehement arguments is that many employees, they say, cannot be trusted to do their work unless they are under constant supervision.

While it is true that every organization has its share of "loafers," management generally knows who these employees are, and they would obviously not be among those selected for telecommuting options. Companies that have found success in telecommuting say that the key is to reach an agreement with the telecommuting candidate in advance regarding job expectations, productivity, frequency of contact with the office, etc. In most cases, employees who work from home realize that they have to work harder and show a higher level of productivity in order to make the arrangement

Committee to Study Training Options

President Clinton in June appointed a group of industry experts to the Advisory Committee on Expanding Training Opportunities. The 14-member panel will provide an independent assessment on how the federal government can encourage the effective use of learning technologies. The focus will be on improving the accessibility and cost-effectiveness of training for all Americans.

By studying the progress made by the federal government in its use of technology in training programs, the committee hopes to adopt successful techniques and establish methods for improving technology training in the private sector as well.

The committee will also provide an analysis of options for helping adult Americans finance the training and post-secondary education needed to upgrade skills and gain new knowledge. Grants, tax incentives, and low-interest loans will be among the options studied.

Committee co-chairs are Ms. Christine Hemrick from Cisco and Ms. Hillary Pennington from Jobs for the Future.

Other committee members include Mr. Jerry Jasinowski from the National Association of Manufacturers and Dr. Anthony Carnevale from the Educational Testing Service.

"An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest."

— Ben Franklin

New Law Means More Workers

In today's booming economy, one of the biggest challenges businesses face is finding capable employees. But now, thanks to new legislation that lifts earning restrictions for Social Security recipients, a predicted 800,000 more employees will be back in the workforce.

Signed into effect in April, the law will affect Americans aged 65 to 69. Previously, their Social Security benefits were reduced by one dollar for every three dollars over \$17,000 earned per year. This penalty was one of the top reasons that older Americans chose to stop working after they retired.

Citing America's shortage of skilled workers, the National Federation of Independent Businesses, the Committee for Economic Development, and other groups have been lobbying to have the law changed. The impact of this change is predicted to have profoundly increasing effects on America's workforce in the coming years.

The first wave of baby boomers is approaching retirement age. In 30 years, 20 percent of Americans will be 65 or older. Additionally, the number of people over 55 is increasing at twice the rate at which the total workforce is expanding. In three years, the number of workers over 40 will exceed the number under 40.

Coupled with today's lower birthrates, clearly, employers are going to have to start recognizing the potential contributions of older workers.

In addition to the recent legislation, the Senate is working on a proposal that would enable workers to phase into retirement by gradually reducing their work hours instead of leaping from full-time work right into full-time retirement.

desirable for the employer as well. Most are only too eager to do so in order to remain eligible for telecommuting options.

Reluctant employers also argue that not having an employee readily available and within easy access would place a hardship on the organization overall. Test cases, however, show that telecommuters are no less accessible than on-site employees. They are only a phone call away — which is the normal means by which most on-site workers communicate with each other. And a quick page, phone call, or email can alert the employee to come in to the work site for any face-to-face meetings necessary. Successful telecommuting companies say that, ideally, they usually have telecommuting employees show up to the work site on a regularly scheduled basis (e.g., every Tuesday, every pay day, every other Monday). They use this on-site time to conduct any necessary meetings, briefings, work reviews, or training sessions.

Finally, many employers worry that if they let some employees telecommute, it will upset those who are not allowed to.

Countering this argument is the fact that no two jobs are ever equal within a company. Employees will always find aspects of other people's jobs more appealing than their own — whether it's that another employee is required to stand less often, makes more money, has a better benefits package, has more opportunities to earn overtime, got promoted more quickly, gets more interesting work assignments, etc. To this end, telecommuting options can actually be used to motivate non-telecommuting employees by explaining what steps they can take to be eligible for telecommuting options (e.g., improving their attendance record, increasing their productivity, advancing their education so they can apply for a job that allows telecommuting).

The average telecommuter is just over 40, earns \$51,000 a year, and works about 19 hours a week from the house, according to a study by FIND/SVP. Seventy-six percent of them are married and 46 percent have kids at home. However, any employee of any age and income level probably has some aspect of their job — even if just a small amount — that can be accomplished on a telecommuting basis. By applying a large measure of common sense and a desire to try something new, employers can easily identify those employees who would make the best candidates for implementing such a program.

Companies that can get past the old-school philosophy certainly stand to gain a lot by creating a win-win situation. Using the results of the AT&T study, an organization with 100 employees, 20 of whom telecommute, could potentially realize a savings of \$200,000 annually. What employer is going to turn down the opportunity to not only save money, but to also improve employee morale while doing so?

As technology continues to advance, it's a good bet that not only is telecommuting here to stay, but that it might someday become even more common than on-site work.

Williamson: "Virginia is a Technology Leader"

Virginia's Deputy Secretary of Technology, Fred H. Williamson, visited Danville on June 21 as the keynote speaker to the Community Technology Forum 2000 series. Speaking to a group comprised of business, public service, and education leaders, Williamson repeatedly stressed that the key to keeping Virginia's businesses competitive is technology.

"Take every opportunity to get technology into the air you breathe and make it part of everything you do," Williamson urged. He cited high bandwidth services as a strong state-wide initiative, even in rural areas, and encouraged businesses to pursue expanding their on-line presence.

Williamson also said that Virginia has been earning high marks on technological report cards. He cited "Cyberstates," an American Electronics Association report released in May, as ranking Virginia:

- Second-largest software services state (with over 55,000 related jobs)
- Third-fastest growing technology state (behind Texas and California)
- Ninth in venture capital investments (\$751 million in 1999)
- Eighteenth in electronics exports (\$2.1 billion, up 56 percent since 1997)



According to Fred Williamson, Virginia's Deputy Secretary of Technology, Virginia added 50,300 high-technology jobs between 1993 and 1998.

Local Business Leaders Pursue E-Business Strategies

by Geeta Vashee

In working to enable Virginia's businesses to compete successfully in the new e-Business economy, Virginia's Center for Innovative Technology (CIT), in cooperation with Deloitte & Touche, sponsored an e-Business Transformation Workshop in Danville on June 1.

This results-oriented workshop was specifically designed to address issues unique to established traditional middle-market organizations wishing to launch an e-Business initiative, and imparting to business leaders/owners with responsibility for developing and implementing Internet strategies the understanding and framework to achieve success in the New Economy. Over 35 business representatives from Danville, Martinsville, and surrounding counties attended the workshop and used the opportunity to exchange ideas and network.

In recognizing the value of this event for our region, the workshop was preceded by focus group meetings in South Boston/Halifax County; Danville/Pittsylvania County; and Martinsville/Franklin/Henry/Patrick counties to develop a collaborative marketing and promotion strategy to ensure regional outreach and awareness. The following groups played a major role in the focus groups' meetings:

- Chambers of Commerce
- Economic Development Organizations
- The Southern Piedmont Technology Council
- The Regional Center for Applied Technology and Training
- The Small Business Development Centers
- The Continuing Education Center at Patrick Henry Community College
- The Center for Business, Industry and Government at Danville Community College
- West Piedmont Planning District Commission
- The Dan River Business Development Center
- The Southern Virginia Economic Development Partnership
- The University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service

Upcoming Events

RCATT Moves

**On July 5, RCATT will be moving from
its office at DCC to
230 South Ridge Street
Danville VA 24541
(the old Sears building)
Telephone: 773-3034**

**Quality Conference
in October
Quality Awareness Month**

Conference Details to Come

The Cutting Edge is a publication of the Regional Center for Applied Technology & Training. The Cutting Edge welcomes feedback, ideas, and material for publication in this newsletter. To contact The Cutting Edge staff, email RCATT@dc.cc.va.us or call 804-797-8516.

The Cutting Edge is available on-line at RCATT's web site at <http://www.dc.cc.va.us/RCATT/index.html>

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CIT Funds Polymers Feasibility Study



Participating in the presentation are (l to r) Delegate Whitt Clement; Anne Armstrong, CIT President; Dr. Carlyle Ramsey, DCC President; Dr. Jim Johnson, RCATT Executive Director; Dr. Maxine Pitter Lunn, CIT Vice President of Technology Programs; Linda Green, CIT Director; and Senator Charles Hawkins.

The Regional Center for Applied Technology and Training (RCATT) at Danville Community College received a \$25,000 grant from Virginia's Center for Innovative Technology (CIT) to conduct a feasibility study for the implementation of a Polymer Manufacturing Research and Technology Transfer Institute.

In making the announcement at a dinner for business, education, government, and industry leaders on July 17, CIT President Anne Armstrong said, "This proposal complements CIT's mis-

sion to advance the Commonwealth's position as a world technology and Internet leader and to assist in creating, retaining, and attracting technology-based businesses."

DCC President Dr. B. Carlyle Ramsey said the college is a partner in the economic development of the region, and a polymer institute could provide an array of services to both existing and new manufacturers, such as technical information and applied research and development for product commercialization. Other potential services to be studied include rapid response answers; product testing, demonstration, and prototyping; market research and feasibility assessment; and facilitation of consulting services.

"We are excited about the potential for this area," Ramsey said. "RCATT will create an active partnership with other research centers, including academia, economic development organizations, and government agencies. Through these partnerships, the work of a polymer institute can play a vital role in strengthening Virginia's economic development efforts. We are very appreciative of CIT's support."

RCATT Executive Director Dr. Jim Johnson sees a number of opportunities for this area with a Polymer Manufacturing Research and Technology Transfer Institute. He and several other RCATT board members have visited similar programs in other cities.

"We believe that a polymers center would provide a hard shot of adrenaline into Southern Virginia's economy. Over 65 percent of local manufacturers use some type of plastics application in their processes. In addition, there are nearly 30 businesses within a 50-mile radius of DCC that specialize in polymers and plastics. A center such as the one in our study would provide a much-needed service to these existing companies and would entice similar businesses to relocate to the

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Manufacturing Time Capsule

With manufacturing being so high-tech, it's hard to believe that the field's baby steps began only in the past century. Check out these firsts:

1895 - Gillette invents the safety razor

1896 - The Duryea brothers produce gas-powered automobiles

1897 - National Biscuit Company begins use of cardboard boxes

1898 - Frank and Charles Seiberling establish the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co., which becomes the nation's largest tire maker by 1917

1899 - Kellogg's Corn Flakes first sold

1900 - George Eastman manufactures the first Brownie camera

1901 - J.P. Morgan organizes National Steel Corporation

1902 - Standard Oil begins using steel barrels instead of wooden ones

1903 - Henry Ford opens Ford Motor Company (with \$100,000)

1904 - Initial development of stainless steel begins

1905 - First neon sign appears

1906 - Paper milk cartons are made

(Source: National Association of Manufacturers)

region," Johnson explained.

Johnson said the outcome of the feasibility study would include a comprehensive report on projected polymer and other industry growth, financial resources to support the institute, a sustainable funding mechanism, and a marketing plan for the institute.

Virginia's CIT has long supported economic development by serving technology-based businesses since its inception by the General Assembly in 1984. It is a non-profit, non-stock-based organization funded by the Commonwealth. Headquartered in Herndon, VA, CIT has seven regional offices in Charlottesville, Danville, Lynchburg, Newport News, Portsmouth, Richmond, and Roanoke.

As part of its charter, CIT provides funding that stimulates economic growth in the Commonwealth. The funds are administered by CIT through its Research Institute Feasibility Awards program.

Linda Green, CIT Director based in Danville, said CIT believes in a balanced approach to offset short-term tactics with long-term investment in the research and development infrastructure and the support of existing and emerging technology industry sectors. She explained that the feasibility program was designed to facilitate an assessment of the applicability and sustainability of research initiatives, while guiding the appropriate decision process at the local level.

"In the past, these studies have served as a leverage or bridge in acquiring additional federally funded centers in some instances, and in others avoided a direction that was neither in the best interest of the center or region," Green said. "The RCATT feasibility award is structured around the potential for serving the needs of existing rubber and plastics companies in the region and serving as a center of excellence for attracting additional jobs."

Why Polymers?

What images first come to mind when you hear the word "polymers"? A chemist in a white lab coat? Perhaps a cocktail of letters and symbols from the periodic table of elements? Or maybe even the gelatinous goop that played the title role in the classic Disney movie, "Flubber"?

Does the word ever bring up images of the end product? Such as milk jugs? Or garbage bags? Or patio furniture or eye glasses or electronics or any of the other myriad of useful polymer products that surround us?

Plastics touch every aspect of our lives in some way. For manufacturers, this is particularly true as well over half of manufacturers use polymers in their processes. If you figure in plastic components used in their machinery and packaging, it becomes nearly all manufacturers that rely on polymers.

In the Southern Virginia region, there are numerous manufacturers who not only use polymers in their operations, but who specialize in its manufacture — Intertape Polymer Group, Goodyear Tire & Rubber, Presto Products, RTP, and Hickson DanChem are examples. In fact, there are more than 30 polymer manufacturers -- over 10 percent of the Commonwealth's total — within a 50-mile radius of Danville.

Thus, it was only natural that when the opportunity arose to study the feasibility of implementing a polymers center of excellence, RCATT jumped at the chance and applied to Virginia's Center for Innovative Technology (CIT) for a grant.

"The field of polymers is moving with incredible momentum. If there's an opportunity to bring more of this momentum to our region, we are eager to do so," said Dr. Jim Johnson, RCATT Executive Director.

Momentum, indeed! Nationwide, there are 1.5 million jobs in the plastics industry, and that number has been increasing at a rate of 25 percent since 1994. As the fourth largest U.S. industry, plastics and polymers shipments total \$304 billion annually, up 35 percent.

The news is even better when you look at figures for the state of Virginia. Employment in Virginia's polymer industry totaled 25,000 in 1999, a 37-percent increase in 5 years. Polymer shipments in Virginia totaled \$4.6 billion in 1999, a 55-percent increase in 5 years.

With 241 plastics facilities, Virginia is the 20th-largest state in terms of polymer industry employment and the eighth-fastest-growing state in the polymer industry overall.

Until about 10 years ago, most polymer jobs were blue-collar, requiring little or no advanced technology applications. Innovations in processing technologies have changed the situation, and there is now a pressing need for more advanced technological expertise in this field. However, there are very few two-year college institutions that offer polymer education programs, and none of them are in the state of Virginia.

All the more reason to consider beefing up the region's polymers focus and educational opportunities.

Thus, in addition to conducting the feasibility study for a Polymer Manufacturing Research and Technology Transfer Institute, RCATT also has plans under way to create a Polymers & Plastics Manufacturing degree program. The track will be an optional part of its Advanced Manufacturing Technology program, which will offer Associate of Applied Science degrees in a manufacturing science curriculum.

"There are a lot of opportunities and potential benefits in polymer programs. What we are doing right now is trying to determine what type of benefits could be reaped in this region and how to best make those benefits a reality," Johnson explained.

So the next time you hear the word polymers, don't just think of a smelly chemistry lab. Think of dinnerware and tennis shoes and cellular phones and fiber optics. Think of educational opportunities and jobs and economic benefits for the Southern Virginia region.

There's a lot more to the word "polymers" than meets the eye.

General Colin Powell's Rules for Picking People

Lesson 13:

Look for intelligence and judgment, and, most critically, a capacity to anticipate, to see around corners. Also look for loyalty, integrity, a high energy drive, a balanced ego, and the drive to get things done.

How often do our recruitment and hiring processes tap into these attributes?

More often than not, we ignore them in favor of length of resume, degrees, and prior titles. A string of job descriptions a recruit held yesterday seem to be more important than who one is today, what they can contribute tomorrow, or how well their values mesh with those of the organization. You can train a bright, willing novice in the fundamental of your business fairly readily, but it's a lot harder to train someone to have integrity, judgment, energy, balance, and the drive to get things done. Good leaders stack the deck in their favor right in the recruitment phase.

(Source: General Colin Powell: A Leadership Primer)

Did you know . . . ?

According to the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, Virginia's population is growing 23 percent faster than the U.S. average.

Dot.Com Trends

What areas of the U.S. do Internet companies find the most appealing? Online employment giant Monster.com did a study recently and lists the following U.S. cities as being home to the largest number of dot.coms:

- Washington, D.C.
- New York
- San Francisco
- Atlanta
- Los Angeles
- Seattle
- Boston

Employment Trends

Regional and state unemployment were stable in August. All four regions registered little or no change over the month, and 46 states recorded shifts of 0.3 percent or less, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor. The national jobless rate was essentially unchanged at 4.1 percent. Nonfarm employment increased in 31 states and the District of Columbia in August.

Economy Trends

Although the Federal Reserve Board has been trying to slow down the U.S. economy somewhat by raising short-term interest rates, the economy refuses to be deterred. In its quarterly estimate of Gross Domestic Product, the Commerce Department reported that the economy appeared to have grown at a vigorous annual rate of 5.2 percent from April through June this year.

Dan River Business Development Center: Full Steam Ahead!!



State representatives and local business leaders help get construction of the Dan River Business Development Center off to a good start.

The Dan River Business Development Center officially broke ground on July 18 to the appreciative cheers of several dozen business, educational, and government representatives and local citizens who attended the event.

The center will be located at 300 Ringgold Industrial Parkway, which is off Kentuck Road. Construction of the 30,000-square-foot building is expected to be completed in late December, with the facility open for business by mid-January.

Honoring the event, the City of Danville declared the day to be the region's first annual Entrepreneur Day. In reading the proclamation, Danville Mayor John Hamlin noted that Entrepreneur Day was created, "To mark the importance of support for small business start-ups."

Business development centers, commonly called "business incubators," support the creation of new business enterprises. The center's Charter Chairman, Mark Gignac, explained that the Dan River Business Development Center will provide space and services such as secretarial, managerial and financial guidance, and certain laboratory support, business advice, and technical resources, all at reduced costs to the new entrepreneurs admitted as tenants.

"More than 500 incubators have been created in the past 20 years in the United States," Gignac noted, "however, the Southeastern portions of the U.S. lag in the development of incubators or business development centers."

Creation of the Dan River Business Development Center began with a study conducted by the Danville Chamber of Commerce 6 years ago. The

study identified the need to grow more businesses locally that would remain in the area. Committees were formed and Virginia Tech was commissioned to conduct a feasibility study. The effort became a joint city/county initiative, and both state and federal funding were obtained for the project.

“Ultimately, the generosity of our funding bodies enabled this facility to be erected debt free, so as to avoid any debt equity in the crucial early stages of operations,” stated John Friend, the center’s current chairman.

During the ceremony, center President Harold Garrison announced three new programs created in conjunction with partnerships in the initial development stages of the center:

- The Microenterprise Program - Partially funded through a grant from the Virginia Enterprise Initiative, the program will provide business skills training, technical assistance, microloans, and follow-up assistance. Included will be monthly seminars called, “Should You Start Your Own Small Business?” Services will also consist of classes covering specific business topics, one-on-one counseling, and assistance in completing business plans and financial projections. Microloans will range from \$500 to \$25,000.
- The Small Business Development Center Program - Administered by the Virginia Department of Business Assistance, the program serves as a focal point to link and leverage valuable resources of federal, state, and local organizations with those of colleges, universities, non-profit organizations, chambers of commerce, industrial development authorities, and private sector corporations to meet the specialized and complex needs of the small business community. Small- and medium-sized businesses are defined as having 100 or fewer employees.
- Dan River Region Electronic Commerce Forum - Supported through funding by Virginia’s Center for Innovative Technology (CIT), the forum is part of CIT’s Dan River Region Electronic Business Village. The forum will provide information, seminars, lectures, and other materials and events useful to the promotion of e-commerce. The forum will act as a “regional town hall” for the business community, encouraging the formation of joint ventures, partnerships, and the sharing of information on effective applications of electronic commerce technologies.

In making the award for CIT, Anne Armstrong, CIT President, said, “The Dan River Region Electronic Village is anticipated to accelerate the growth of Internet technologies as a necessary ingredient for the success of entrepreneurial start-ups serviced by the Dan River Business Development Center.”

For more information on the Dan River Business Development Center, visit the center’s web site at www.danriverincubator.com or contact the center’s president, Harold Garrison, at 804-793-9100 or drbdc@gamewood.net

A Snapshot of Incubators

- 80 percent of businesses not using incubator services fail within the first 5 years
- 87 percent of businesses using incubators succeed
- There are approx. 550 business incubators in the nation
- There are more than 8,000 firms currently housed in incubators nationwide
- Nationwide, business incubators have graduated 4,500 successful entrepreneurial firms
- Some incubators concentrate on industry niches:
 - 43 percent mixed use
 - 25 percent technology
 - 10 percent manufacturing
 - 9 percent targeted*
 - 6 percent service
 - 5 percent empowerment
 - 2 percent other

* Targeted incubators focus on assisting start-up companies from a specific industry, such as biomedical, wood products, arts, food production, fashion, etc.

(Source: National Business Incubation Association)

Merchants and Consumers Prepare for Online Holiday Frenzy

Researchers are predicting that online holiday shopping will result in a banner year for e-commerce sales. However, they warn that along with heightened sales, retailers can also expect heightened expectations among shoppers.

According to studies conducted by Forrester Research and Pricewaterhousecoopers, online spending will surpass \$10 billion during the holiday season. That's twice the amount from 1999.

Forrester analyst Christopher Kelly said that research indicates that 16.6 million U.S. households will do their holiday shopping online, leaving long lines and crowded parking lots to the less cyber-savvy. One-third of all Internet users will make online purchases between Thanksgiving and New Year's.

However, those who do shop online have some strong opinions about what types of Internet sites they are more likely to shop at, according to research conducted by AT&T.

The AT&T survey, which polled 600 online consumers, found that more than three-quarters of shoppers said concern about the security of their personal and financial information affects their selection of web sites. Half said they also expect to see web sites that are more user-friendly, with faster download times and easier navigation. On-time delivery of their merchandise is a concern as well.

Calling all Executives!!

Local Manufacturers Can Become Internet Technology Leaders

The Regional Center for Applied Technology & Training (RCATT) is looking for senior-level manufacturing executives to participate in an exciting program to develop manufacturing uses of the Internet.

The program, called "Internet Incubator," is being funded through a \$25,000 grant from Virginia's Center for Innovative Technology (CIT). Selected senior executives from the Southern Virginia region will be invited to participate in an alliance to help incubate and implement various Internet applications at their companies.

One of the program's goals is to provide an effective yet convenient way to help local executives increase their knowledge and understanding of the latest online technologies.

According to RCATT Executive Director Dr. Jim Johnson, "The program has been designed for senior executives because they are the ones leading their companies into the future, providing the technological vision and guidance, and setting the stage for their company's future success."

Johnson explained that many senior executives rely on recommendations made by staff members regarding information technology issues. The problem is that staff members often don't have the same understanding of the company's strategic goals as the senior executive has.

"This program will increase a senior executive's understanding of online technology to the point that he or she can become a more knowledgeable leader to ensure that the company's technological endeavors best match the company's future goals," Johnson said.

The program will feature six sessions consisting of seminars presented by experts on various Internet topics. There is no cost for participants other than paying for their own meals at the lunch-time sessions.

The sessions begin October 31 and continue every six weeks until June 5. In addition to the featured speakers and learning opportunities, the program will also provide participants with limited on-site consultation to aid development of specific Internet-related improvements, as well as access to an electronic manufacturing network that will allow them to benefit from the knowledge and experience of others.

"The program was designed to accommodate the very hectic schedules that senior executives carry," Johnson stated. "The reason executives are not always up-to-date on information technology issues is because traditional learning methods are time-consuming. Most company leaders don't have time to keep going back to college to keep pace with every new technological advance. And they don't have time to try to read all the existing and ever-changing technical publications and then try to fig-

ure out how or even if a particular technology would be beneficial for their company. This program is different because it cuts right to the chase by looking at only those technologies that would be beneficial in a manufacturing environment.”

For program participation, senior executives are defined as those who serve in decision-making capacities with responsibility for their business’s overall operations. Chief executive officers, chief operating officers, and plant managers are examples.

Participants will be asked to bring one staff member with them to each of the sessions. The selection of staff members will probably vary according to each session’s topic. For example, a Human Resources specialist might be appropriate for a topic on internal communications. An information technology specialist might be appropriate for a topic on system infrastructure.

This type of format was created to ensure that the appropriate technical person was also included in the process.

“Our goal is to also open up informed technical communications between the senior executive and his or her various staff members responsible for designing or implementing various aspects of online technology usage,” Johnson explained.

Tentative program topics include:

- Using the Internet as a Business Tool
- Infrastructure for Internet Opportunities
- Using the Internet for Internal Communications
- Using the Internet for Procurement
- Expanding Customer Services via the Internet

“We’ll teach participants what they need to know to make astute information technology decisions, and we will help them implement those decisions,” Johnson stated.

He said that there are 20 openings available in the project alliance.

“Being selected to join is certainly an honor and will place participants ahead of their executive peers throughout their company’s various branches and among their competitors. Participants will emerge with a heightened understanding of Internet use in a manufacturing environment. This knowledge is an invaluable asset for a company decision-maker to have.”

For more information on the Internet Incubator project or to apply for participation, manufacturing executives should contact RCATT Executive Director Jim Johnson at 804-773-3034.

“Not only wealth, but the independence of a country, appear to be materially connected with the prosperity of manufacturers. Every nation, with a view to those great objectives, ought to endeavor to possess within itself all the essentials of national supply.”

—Alexander Hamilton, 1791

Welcome Kathy Gauthier!



The Cutting Edge would like to welcome the newest member of the RCATT team, Kathy Gauthier.

Ms. Gauthier will administer RCATT’s employee assessment and job profiling program. Her responsibilities include working one-on-one with local manufacturers and other businesses to assess the needs of their incumbent workforce as well as new hires. Using the assessments, she will work with clients to formulate training programs to increase the skill levels according to the varying needs of each company.

In New Orleans, Gauthier worked as a Training Specialist for Ochsner Hospital. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Education from the University of New Orleans and is currently working on her MBA. An accredited Professional in Human Resources, she is also a member of the American Society for Training and Development as well as the Society for Human Resources Management.

Gauthier hit the ground running with RCATT, developing and conducting a training course for a local company only one day after she was hired. Since then she has been busy meeting with various company representatives and has begun development of several programs.

Upcoming Events

LEAN 101 - Principles of Lean Manufacturing 101 October 19, 2000

Learn how to get lean * Reduce lead times
Improve process flow * Increase inventory turns
and Much More!

LEAN 203 - Visual Workplace Organization December 13, 2000

Learn how to transform a factory into a place where thousands of
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Regional Center for Applied Technology & Training RCATT

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Southern Virginia is Prime Region for Electronic Commerce

The first meeting of the Regional Center for Applied Technology and Training's (RCATT's) *Internet Incubator Alliance* brought encouraging and optimistic words for the Southern Virginia region from a leading Internet expert.

Speaking to the 30 local business leaders who have joined the alliance, William Muir Jr., Director of the Virginia Electronic Commerce Technology Center at Christopher Newport University, said that Danville and the Southern Virginia region offer great potential for new business-to-business electronic commerce opportunities.

Small businesses in the Danville area have the capability to beat out their competitors elsewhere by establishing themselves as cost-effective suppliers through business-to-business Internet sales transactions, he explained. The affordability of doing business in the Southern Virginia region puts local manufacturers in the unique position of being able to be extremely cost-competitive. Companies elsewhere that have higher operating costs could face a real challenge from Danville area businesses if the local companies expanded their sales onto the worldwide web.

Muir cautioned that while the Internet offers local businesses the potential to expand their market and increase their sales, the technology could also lead to a company's demise if they do not consider using the Internet as a business tool.

"If Virginia businesses don't get involved in this, you're going to lose business because your competitors are doing it today," Muir said. "The web is exploding, no doubt about it, and business-to-business is the big dog on the block."

As support, Muir cited statistics that show the Internet accounts for a \$325 billion portion of the U.S. economy. That figure will soon surpass the auto industry, which is currently at the \$350 billion mark. "Consider how long the auto industry has been in existence, and then consider that the Internet has only been around for five or so years," he said.

Also speaking at the luncheon was Craig Brubaker of Newport News Shipbuilding. Brubaker told alliance members about the many challenges his company faced when they expanded into e-commerce 5 years ago and the successes they have reaped from their efforts since then.

Brubaker explained that his company now uses the Internet for everything from soliciting supplier bids to providing automated transfers of benefits, HR, payment, procurement, and payroll data to banks and business partners.



William Muir, Jr. (left), of the Virginia Electronic Commerce Technology Center, and Craig Brubaker, of Newport News Shipbuilding, urge Southern Virginia businesses to compete with industry globally.

In This Issue . . .

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- 3 Electronic Village
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- 8 Upcoming Events

RCATT Offers A+ Certification Prep Courses

In mid-January, DCC's Regional Center for Applied Technology & Training (RCATT) will begin offering A+ certification courses. The A+ certification is a testing program sponsored by the Computing Technology Industry Association (CompTIA) that certifies the competency of service technicians in the computer industry. The RCATT courses are designed to help students pass the A+ certification exams.

For A+ certification, applicants must pass both the A+ Core Service Technician and the A+ DOS/Windows Service Technician exams. The skills and knowledge measured by these exams are derived from an industry-wide job task analysis and validated through a worldwide survey of over 5,000 A+ certified professionals.

The RCATT program consists of three courses to run 9 weeks each. The first course is an introduction to basic A+ skills. The other two courses focus on the specific skills tested by the two A+ exams.

A+ certifications are internationally recognized as valuable proof of job skills. Students usually seek the certifications to help expand their career horizons and earning power. Employers generally find the certifications a valuable measure of an employee's ability. Many employers send their own employees to the training courses to ensure that their staff is working with the most current and advanced set of industry skills available.

For information on the A+ course program, contact RCATT Training Coordinator Kathy Gauthier at 804-773-3048.



Several members of the Regional Center for Applied Technology & Training's Internet Incubator Alliance listen to a presentation at the group's kick-off meeting.

Brubaker reiterated Muir's thoughts that e-commerce is quickly becoming a key element to a business's success.

"I came here today with the goal of encouraging suppliers in this area to become e-commerce capable to facilitate their opportunities to do business with Newport News Shipbuilding," he said.

Brubaker said there are currently approximately 30 businesses from the Danville area that are registered as authorized suppliers for his company.

The *Internet Incubator Alliance* at which Muir and Brubaker made their presentations is sponsored by RCATT under a grant from Virginia's Center for Innovative Technology (CIT). The alliance was formed to provide an effective and convenient method to help local executives increase their knowledge and understanding of the latest online technologies to ensure that their companies' technological strategies best match their company's future goals.

The alliance features six luncheon sessions consisting of seminars presented by experts on various Internet topics. The first session, featuring Muir and Brubaker, was held November 7. Each of the remaining five sessions will be held every six weeks until early June. In addition to the featured speakers and learning opportunities, the program will also provide participants with limited on-site consultation to aid development of specific Internet-related improvements, as well as access to an electronic manufacturing network that will allow them to benefit from the knowledge and experience of others. All participant costs except lunches are covered through the CIT grant.

Topics to be covered include using the Internet as a business tool, infrastructure for Internet opportunities, using the Internet for internal communications, using the Internet for procurement, and expanding customer service via the Internet.

Participants are asked to bring one staff member with them to each of the sessions. The selection of staff members vary according to each session's topic.

RCATT Executive Director Dr. Jim Johnson said that there are still a limited number of spaces available in the alliance. Interested executives may sign up to participate in the remaining five sessions.

For more information, contact Johnson at 804-773-3034.

Businesses that would like more information on how to become an authorized supplier for Newport News Shipbuilding can contact the company's manager of supply chain management, Stephanie Conover, at 757-688-2619.

Danville Launches Electronic Business Village

With electronic commerce making bigger and bigger waves in the business world, it is no surprise that many companies in the Southern Virginia region have expressed an eagerness to embrace this new technology themselves. But how does a business owner get started — especially if they have no experience in the field?

Several local organizations — Virginia's Center for Innovative Technology (CIT), the Virginia Electronic Commerce Technology Center (VECTEC), and the Dan River Business Development Center — are collaborating to address this need through creation of an electronic business village in the Danville area. This effort complements various RCATT programs such as the *Internet Incubator Alliance* and the annual e-commerce symposium.

An electronic business village (EBV) is an informal association of businesses that share an interest in promoting regional economic progress through the use of e-commerce technologies. Comprised primarily of small and medium-sized businesses, EBVs provide member businesses with affordable e-commerce technologies and services while promoting the use of e-commerce technologies within their regions.

The Danville EBV's goals include providing two basic kinds of services to the regional business community:

- A set of Internet-related technical services that enable members to establish e-commerce
- A set of programs designed to provide information and training in general e-business topics.

Funding for the Danville EBV is being provided under a \$25,000 grant from Virginia's CIT. Grant administration and program development will be provided by VECTEC. The e-village itself will be delivered by the Dan River Business Development Center, a joint economic development partnership of Danville and Pittsylvania County. Located in the Ringgold Industrial Park, the center is expected to be open for business in mid-January.

The grant is expected to cover start-up costs for the project with the expectation that participating businesses will provide matching funds for

Industry Certifications Help Launch Careers

There was a time when a college degree or vocational training was all that was needed to get a good job. But times are changing. The computer age — with its dynamic and highly specialized skill requirements — has prompted employers to look for more concrete proof of an employee's abilities. The result: Skill certifications.

Skill certifications are awarded to applicants who prove they have mastered specific computer skills by passing standard tests. Skill certifications are offered by both trade industry organizations (the certifications generally cover specific job classifications and are more skill-based) and private corporations (the certifications focus on a specific company product or software package).

Although both types of certifications are valuable assets, trade certifications generally tend to be more affordable. In addition, because they do not tie the employee to a specific product, they offer a wider range of employment options.

Among the most popular is the A+ certification, which covers computer service and maintenance skills. A+ is internationally recognized as valuable proof of job skills.

A+ certifications are not only valuable to employees seeking to establish lucrative careers, but also to employers, who find the certifications a reliable measure of an employee's ability. For this reason, many employers send their own employees to the training courses to ensure that their staff is working with the most current and advanced set of industry skills available.

Danville Electronic Business Village Goals:

- Increase collaborative projects among Southern Virginia businesses
- Increase the incidence of business-to-business (B2B) transactions among Southern Virginia businesses
- Help local businesses understand the costs/benefits of engaging in e-commerce
- Increase the awareness of e-commerce best practices through valuable case studies
- Increase the region's exposure to and understanding of e-commerce technologies and issues
- Evaluate the electronic visibility of Southern Virginia businesses
- Increase the exposure of local firms to global markets

Stable Employment

Following a period of slight decline, manufacturing employment stabilized in the 1990s. Following the recession in the early 90s, manufacturing employment has remained at around 18.5 million workers.

Historically, manufacturing employment has risen and fallen based on the health of the overall economy. Employment rose sharply during the 1940s, but then oscillated in the 1950s, reaching a low point in 1960. A new period of increasing manufacturing employment began in the early 1960s, peaking in 1979. The period from 1980 to 1991 was similar to the 1950s in that manufacturing employment declined.

(Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics)

the services they receive.

Examples of services for which participating businesses pay include web site development, site hosting, etc. Membership in the village itself, however, is free, and members are not required to obtain necessary services from the EBV administrators.

According to Geeta Vashee, CIT's Associate Regional Director, the only requirement for membership in Danville's EBV is "an interest in e-commerce, a willingness to help other businesses get started in e-commerce, and a willingness to help the e-village leadership provide activities that promote e-commerce to benefit the entire business community group."

Participation in an EBV has an expected cycle of one to two years. After this, member businesses usually migrate on to the private sector to continue their e-commerce activities at a more sophisticated level.

Vashee said that she believes the Danville EBV will be a welcome addition to the local business community.

"E-commerce is expanding rapidly," she said. "The Dan River e-village will provide an additional resource to help facilitate entry into the e-commerce mode."

Vashee said that businesses have expressed concern over areas such as:

- Start-up costs
- A lack of training in the necessary technologies
- Insufficient information regarding the costs and benefits of e-commerce
- A perceived high level of business risk
- Uncertainty about the future of e-commerce
- Concerns over online security issues

Vashee said that the EBV will join RCATT efforts to help address these issues.

She believes that having the Dan River Business Development Center deliver Danville's EBV services will be a perfect match for the center's abilities.

"This initiative will enhance and complement the center's mission to create an environment for providing a comprehensive set of value-added business programs, services, and educational opportunities that enable entrepreneurs to succeed," she said. "In addition, the center's support will significantly contribute to economic development within the Dan River Region by providing the necessary infrastructure and valuable consulting services at rates that are affordable for companies at the start-up level."

For more information on Danville's electronic business village, including details of how to join, contact CIT's Geeta Vashee at 804-791-5376 or Harold Garrison, President of the Dan River Business Development Center, at 804-793-9100.

Tech Council Aims to Fuel Local Technology

One on One Interview with SPTC Chair Ted Crane

The Southern Piedmont Technology Council (SPTC) is now entering its third year of operation. In September, Mr. Ted Crane assumed the position as Council Chairman, taking over the successful work of previous Chair Jerry Hill.

The Cutting Edge recently had the opportunity to sit down with Crane and listen to his ideas on the technology challenges the Southern Piedmont area faces and the role that SPTC strives to play in meeting these challenges.

As General Manager of Adelphia in Danville, Crane marks nearly 25 years of experience in the cable industry. He began his local tenure in 1994 when Cablevision Industries (now Adelphia) transferred him to Danville.



Ted Crane, Chairman of the Southern Piedmont Technology Council.

Cutting Edge: Mr. Crane, can you tell us a little bit about the background of the SPTC?

Ted Crane: The Southern Piedmont Technology Council was formed in June of 1998 to promote technology in the Southern Piedmont community. The Southern Virginia Economic Development partnership created the council with seed funding provided by Virginia's Center for Innovative Technology. The SPTC represents the counties of Franklin, Halifax, Henry, Patrick, and Pittsylvania, as well as the cities of Danville and Martinsville, not excluding surrounding counties or cities that are interested in technology. The council is one of eight tech councils in Virginia and part of the Virginia Technology Alliance. The council's mission is to advance regional technology for business, industry, government, education and manufacturing. Now in its third year, it continues to receive funding from CIT.

Cutting Edge: Like most other communities, this area faces some fairly challenging technology issues. What prompted you to take over as chairman of SPTC to help tackle these issues?

Ted Crane: Being in the communications business myself, I have a vested interest in technology in the area and certainly within the region. I'm interested in promoting that and seeing that our region is recognized for its technological capabilities.

Cutting Edge: What are some of SPTC's general objectives?

Ted Crane: Our region has a large technology base in its business and industries, with technology playing a large role in their operations. During our council's formative years, we have strived to meet community needs by raising awareness, integrating and networking with the community, developing formalized processes, and developing and coordinating programs. As it continues to mature, the Tech Council will maintain all the above. But in order to grow and sustain activities, we also need to concentrate on specific areas to increase visibility, to foster partnerships, to build membership, and to promote the understanding of the role and function of a regional Tech Council.

“We plan to fuel community interest and become an integral part of the community”

In addition, Southern Piedmont is experiencing a heightened awareness for the need for cooperation and strategic collaboration in order to cope with and compete in the changing economic landscape. 2001 will be a critical year for the Tech Council. The significant impacts of the loss of textile and tobacco jobs have had a sobering effect on the region. To this end, it will be important to develop sound partnerships and working relationships with other regional organizations so that we can effectively voice our area's needs to the rest of the Commonwealth. The Tech Council plans to fuel community interest and enlist its support so as to be better equipped to carry out its mission and establish itself as an integral part of the community.

Cutting Edge: What are among the most pressing challenges that you feel manufacturers currently face?

Ted Crane: We represent a very wide area of interests. As far as manufacturing goes, organizations like Dan River Mills and others use technology quite a bit. It's not like the old days when things were done by hand. Most of their equipment is to some degree computer-run, and the technology will continue to advance in the manufacturing field. As technology advances, we need to ensure that the infrastructure is in place to keep up with these advances, and this is one of our greatest challenges. We need to understand these companies' needs to ensure that there are adequate plans in place to upgrade existing infrastructure or to provide additional infrastructure. If our council can maintain a strong level of communication, we can provide sound advice and recommendations to business and industry to ensure the most effective means for ensuring that their technology needs are fulfilled.

Cutting Edge: What are your ideas on how to best meet these challenges and foster strong levels of communication within our business community?

Ted Crane: Certainly we want to focus on providing forums that unite the technology community. We want to support technology education and awareness and try to apply technology to enhance the productivity and competitiveness of those in our region. By working together, we can better understand the needs from businesses and communities that use technology — not only from the standpoint of what they need now, but also regarding what they will need tomorrow. This is especially important so that we can start planning today and working together to make sure our region has an effective voice to serve its technology needs. This is addressed in various ways, one of which is in identifying legislative issues we need to promote. We are right now in the midst of determining our legislative agenda for 2001. We have the committee working on these issues so that when we talk to our legislators, we can promote what we feel will be best for our region.

Cutting Edge: It sounds like uniting organizations to work together is essential for our region's success.

Ted Crane: It is. Working together is probably the most effective means for helping this region achieve its economic and technology goals. Teamwork enables us to maximize our use of resources and to build on collaborative partnerships to effectively leverage strategic decisions. We're partnering with various organizations — RCATT is a good example — in efforts to address the "electronic revolution" and the changing way of doing business.

"We can learn a lot by sharing ideas and looking at best practices"

It's also important that we work together with those outside our region as well. This enables us to leverage the different initiatives going on in neighboring communities to facilitate development of resources in our community. We can learn a lot by sharing ideas and looking at the best practices in neighboring communities.

Cutting Edge: What are some additional activities SPTC has planned?

Ted Crane: Well be doing eForums, providing networking opportunities, partnering on various events with local groups, and, as I mentioned, participating in legislative briefings.

Cutting Edge: What do you see as the primary strengths this area offers to manufacturers and other businesses?

Ted Crane: I think our greatest strength is the large manufacturing presence in the region. We also have great access to statewide resources from here. Our area is also increasing its awareness of the new economy and starting to embrace efforts that address the impacts of these changes.

Cutting Edge: With Adelpia being a frontrunner in technology, you must have a good vantage point of trends in the technology and communications arena. What has Adelpia's role been in this effort?

Ted Crane: Here in the Danville office, we are currently upgrading our communications systems, putting in fiber optic cables. We have over 700 miles to upgrade, and we anticipate being finished, hopefully, around April. We just launched some new digital services in Danville. It's probably about 96 additional channels in digital format that requires a digital box. It's a new form of technology similar to what you get on satellite. Within Virginia, our company is building a big fiber ring from Northern Virginia down the highway 29 and 220 corridors. It will come through Danville, go over to Martinsville, then back up 220 through Charlottesville and Northern Virginia. We're also building a fiber ring around Danville that will incorporate some of the industrial parks. We anticipate having the infrastructure in place to help not just residential customers with their needs, but also the business customer as well.

Cutting Edge: Thank you for sharing your ideas. Can we pass along some information on how readers might join the SPTC?

Ted Crane: Our address is P.O. Box 30, Chatham, Virginia, 24531 to request materials and written information on our organization. Or I can be called directly at 804-797-4135 or emailed at tcc@gamewood.net. Our web site is at www.sptc.org. We currently have approximately 25 organizations that each have several representatives with memberships in SPTC. We welcome anyone who uses technology or has an interest in the field. We would love to hear new ideas and concerns and suggestions on any way we can help enhance development in our region.

SPTC Goals

- Apply technology to enhance productivity, effectiveness, and competitiveness
- Promote partnerships for economic and community development
- Provide a forum that unites the technology community
- Establish programs and services for SPTC membership
- Support technology education and awareness
- Support economic development groups
- Encourage financial support for technology growth
- Involve the region in local, state, and federal regulations affecting the technology community
- Develop a support structure to accomplish SPTC goals

"A college degree is not a sign that one is a finished product, but an indication a person is prepared for life."

— — The Rev. Edward A. Malloy

Upcoming Events

A Window into A+ Certification Preparation presented by RCATT

Come by between 1:00 and 4:00 p.m. for an opportunity to speak one-on-one with the instructor. What's on your mind? Content? Format? Time investment? Cost? Opportunities? Your questions will be answered! Contact Kathy Gauthier at 804-773-3048.

DATE: December 15, 2000

LOCATION: RCATT
Danville Area Technology Center
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Danville VA 24541

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