

## Chamber links youth initiatives and workforce

In Durham's knowledge based economy, one, if not the most, critical components is the presence of a smart, well educated and growing workforce. With the various business clusters and job opportunities that abound in Durham, possessing a quality business environment and a growing, tech savvy and well educated workforce is the key for Durham's economic future.

It all starts with providing first-rate education to Durham students to prepare them to enter the workforce.

For nearly two decades, the Durham Chamber has been actively involved in linking workforce development to economic development. Last year, the Chamber staff found its stride in effectively connecting education, primarily K-12, as a critical linchpin in workforce development.

In taking stock of its strengths and capabilities in the education arena, the Chamber staff realized that its strength was its ability to reach out to its members to collect critical data and develop collaboration between the business and education communities. The Chamber's approach is truly signified in its branding – connect, and in this case, connecting public schools to the business community.

A recent Herald Sun article spoke about how the Chamber in partnership with the Durham Public Schools Superintendent's Business Advisory Council, links educators and workforce, and clearly identifies one of the Chamber's initiatives of helping teachers and counselors understand what the modern workplace is like and what workplace traits are most valued by the workplace. This initiative highlights only one of several chamber education initiatives currently underway.

Other Chamber education initiatives include conducting annual forums to inform the business community and general public educational partnerships and efforts, job shadowing and mentoring. Support for youth programs such as Futures for Kids, Student U., Shodor Computational Education, Achievement Academy and many more is provided year-round.

A new initiative that was instituted this year was an evening career expo geared toward educating DPS middle schoolers and their parent/guardians showcasing the vast array of career opportunities available right here in Durham County. At the career expo, students were given the opportunity to talk with career professionals in several of their favorite careers (as assessed by Futures for Kids) as well as explore hundreds of other related careers in life sciences, art, entertainment, finance, construction, computers and more. More than 90 local employees shared information about their chosen profession with the students and their parents/guardians. A second career expo is scheduled for November.

"At the Chamber, our Workforce Development efforts help build relevance into the day-to-day learning process in the classroom", said Kathy Hoffmeier, the Chamber vice president of Workforce Development. "We are helping every student, from high achievers to potential dropouts, reach their potential. We are proud to be a positive force in the community, aligning the talents of DPS students with careers in Durham County."