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## **Signing Day: Career edition**

**Port St. Lucie/June 4** – Student athletes have signing days, now St. Lucie County students seeking careers in manufacturing, trade and distribution have one too.

On June 15, 22 recent graduates of St. Lucie Public Schools will celebrate their completion of the county's first Ready to Work Manufacturing Boot Camp with an opportunity to sign on as employees with local manufacturing, trade and distribution companies.

The students, 21 young men and one young woman, graduates of Fort Pierce Central, Centennial, Lincoln Park Academy, Port St. Lucie and Treasure Coast high schools, will be attending a five-day boot camp designed to prepare them for immediate, high-demand careers.

The June 11-June 15 boot camp will cover the manufacturing process, quality assurance, assembly and packaging, warehousing, distribution, safety and more. The students will also receive a resume review, brush up on interview skills and learn about personal finance. In addition to classroom studies, the boot camp includes instructional field trips to Silver-Line Plastics, Southern Eagle Distributing, Hi-Tide Boat Lifts, Phoenix Metal Products, Walmart Distribution Center, and Pursuit Boats.

"I have a job now where I make \$8.30 an hour. I see this as my chance; nowadays we don't usually get a chance," said Wichla Jules, 19. Jules graduated from Fort Pierce Central last month and was encouraged to apply for the boot camp by her counselor who she said was really excited about the program. The students attended an orientation for the program last month. "The guy from Silver-Line Plastics was there and I actually got to sit down to talk to him. It's pretty amazing what kind of companies we have here," she said. She is looking forward to learning more about a career with Silver-Line and the other participating employers.

The students for this inaugural program were hand-selected by their guidance counselors. “A lot of these kids have technical skills already but are not sure how to put them to use to maximize their career options and income potential. The boot camp and signing day will give these kids an opportunity to soar,” said Kim M. Johnson, M.Ed, NCC, guidance counselor at Fort Pierce Central High School. “When I told them about the program, some of the kids’ faces just lit up. I don’t always get students to return forms, but they sure did for this!”

“This program is hands-on and interactive. Its focus is to assist students in developing a base knowledge of local industries, available opportunities and the soft skills necessary to forge successful career pathways with local companies that are hiring today,” said Jill Marasa, vice president of the Economic Development Council of St. Lucie County (EDC).

The idea for a boot camp and signing day grew out of the EDC’s 2017 Skills Gap Initiative, which led to the formation of the Workforce Readiness Task Force. Made up of business, workforce and education representatives from across the Treasure Coast, the task force serves as a steering committee driving action plans that can bridge the gap between the region’s current workforce skills and those skills needed by area employers. Led by Marcelo Dossantos, vice president of strategic development for CareerSource Research Coast, the task force has also recently rolled out a successful healthcare career fair and manufacturing apprenticeship program.

The boot camp is privately funded, students were referred by guidance counselors or other education professionals. They were required to sign a participation agreement and provide at least one additional reference. “The student response has been fantastic all around,” said Marasa. “We had initially planned on 15 students participating in the program but expanded to 22 students due to the demand”.

The Signing Day event will be held at 11 a.m. Friday, June 15 at the Enterprise Hub at Indian River State College’s St. Lucie West Campus, Building F, 500 N.W. California Boulevard, Port St. Lucie. If you are a local manufacturer, trade or distribution company interested in participating in the Signing Day event, providing employment opportunities for boot camp participants, contact Jill Marasa at (772) 336-6250.

In addition to the employers, the EDC and CareerSource; CenterState Bank, the Boys & Girls Clubs of St. Lucie County, St. Lucie Public Schools, Indian River State College and the Treasure Coast Manufacturers Association partnered in the development of the program.

**About the Economic Development Council of St. Lucie County**

The EDC is a private, not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting economic vitality in St. Lucie County through the attraction, retention and expansion of businesses in the community. The EDC works in partnership with local governments and the private sector to advance its goals of creating more and better-paying jobs for residents, broadening the tax base and improving St. Lucie County's economic quality of life. Contact the EDC at 772.336.6250 or <http://www.youredc.com>.