

## **Career Builders**

By Mary-Alane Wiltse

On behalf of the Workforce Investment Board (WIB) of Columbia & Greene Counties, I am excited to be offering this new column on issues facing both workers and businesses in our local community. As a life-long resident of Greene County and as the Director of the Workforce New York Career Center, located at Columbia-Greene Community College, I have over 20 years of experience helping residents find jobs and businesses find workers.

During these past 20 years of local change and growth, I have noticed one constant - those of us known as true "locals" have a very long collective memory. When I first started helping people build their careers and find jobs, it was in the early 1980's and the region was dealing with an economic recession. Customers would come in and say, "There are no good jobs here". Sometimes it was difficult to remain optimistic and disagree with them.

Today, we still have customers come through our doors and proclaim that there are no good jobs in Columbia or Greene counties. However, it is now much easier to change their minds because our two counties have many employment opportunities in a variety of fields.

A quick review of the businesses that are currently represented on the WIB demonstrates our diversity. In Greene County we have Dynabil, Hunter Mountain, The Bank of Greene County, The Executive Connection, Save-a-Lot, GNH Lumber, Stiefel Laboratories, Betts-Redinger Associates, Brockway-Smith, and Thistle Dew Management Consultants. In Columbia County we have Germantown Telephone, Taconic Farms, Starlight Restaurant, Century 21 Lynn Strunk Realty, Chatco, Ginsberg's, First Niagara Bank, Witham Electric, and Lisa Marie Beauty Salon.

These businesses represent industries ranging from biotechnology to hospitality and recreation, and include manufacturing, finance, real estate, distribution, publishing, construction, wholesale trade, communications, and personal and business services. The businesses are also diverse in their size, ranging from subsidiaries of national corporations to local entrepreneurial enterprises. The jobs they offer also cover the entire spectrum of employment options, from entry-level to highly specialized management and technical positions. Although they are a diverse group, the members who volunteer their time to serve on the WIB do have one thing in common. They all care about our community and they all recognize the importance of their employees to the success of their businesses.

The role of the WIB is to coordinate the workforce needs of business with the economic development needs of the community and the education and employment needs of residents. For that reason other members of the WIB represent educational institutions, labor unions, community based organizations, county governmental departments, and economic development associations.

All of these constituencies work together to help identify the occupational areas and related industries that have the most potential in our area. In-demand occupations are selected because they are in high growth fields, offer current employment opportunities or are part of ongoing economic development projects. They are also jobs that offer career advancement opportunities and/or a livable wage.

So, what are some of the good jobs in Columbia and Greene counties? Twenty-three of the top twenty-five jobs with the largest growth potential in our region fall within three occupational groups. Anything in the health care field will provide a good income and a number places to work. When people think of health care, they often think of only doctors and nurses, but there are also a wide-range of technicians, therapists and medical records occupations. Jobs within the construction industry are also in high demand. This includes everything from carpenters and electricians to welders and heavy equipment operators. Sometime during our recent past trade occupations seemed to get a bad “rep”. Perhaps it is because they do not require a college degree, or because they are physically demanding, or because they are the first to be impacted during economic downswings. Jobs in these fields may not be considered glamorous, but they are highly paid, highly skilled, and in great demand. Computer occupations also offer many opportunities. Although it is true that at the national level thousands of these jobs are migrating overseas, the need for practically every business to have a computer department or consultant services requires many local workers.

Good jobs and exciting businesses do exist here. Future columns will explore these different industries and jobs. There will be advice on how to choose an occupation that is right for you, tips on how to find a job that will meet your needs, and suggestions on how to prosper in your workplace. There will be examinations of outside influences, like the aging of the baby boom generation and the regional Tech Valley initiative.

Building a successful career requires a positive attitude. Updating our collective memory to include the many local opportunities that are available is a good place to start.

*For more information on the services available through the Workforce New York Career Center, visit our website at [www.columbiagreenevents.org](http://www.columbiagreenevents.org), or call 828-4181 ext. 5510.*