

## Central Florida workforce board helps jobseekers train for careers in energy

*A record number of home foreclosures and soaring unemployment have left the Ocala, Florida, region trying to cope with the economic slowdown.<sup>1</sup> To help people get back to work, the workforce board and its partners are preparing the area's labor force for a proposed \$17 billion nuclear plant.*

### Situation

Last year Florida lawmakers passed legislation requiring that every school district in the state have at least one career academy that offers industry-specific training “aligned directly to priority workforce needs.”<sup>2</sup> The goal is to ensure that students have a targeted professional path and come away with industry certification or postsecondary credit by the time they leave high school.

In central Florida, this legislation coincided with two significant developments:

- In a 12-month span, nearly 1,100 manufacturing jobs were lost in Citrus, Marion, and Levy counties. As a result, the Ocala metropolitan area's 10.1% jobless rate is the second-highest in Florida after being just 3.2% midway through 2007.
- Progress Energy announced plans for a massive nuclear plant project in rural Levy County that would create as many as 3,000 jobs during peak construction and at least 800 in full operation. In addition, another nuclear plant in Citrus County has been seeking to replace a glut of potential retirees to handle its coal-fire and nuclear reactors.

With these factors converging, regional planners started exploring how they could use the energy sector to strengthen the tri-county workforce. CLM Workforce Connection in Ocala and its regional partners had already established three career academies, one in each county to prepare a pipeline of youth for the utility industry. However, it was apparent that the two rural counties bordering the proposed site in Levy County that are outside of the workforce region needed to move forward to prepare their residents. Progress Energy supplied a planning grant for the three school boards, CLM, two community colleges, and industry to craft a data-focused plan on which training academies should be developed.

### Challenges

While preparations for the Levy County nuclear plant began to take shape, Kathleen Woodring, CLM's Chief Operations Officer, was able to quickly determine the potential impact of 3,000 energy-related jobs for this new region using an input-output model from EMSI. The results indicated that the addition of 3,000 jobs would have significant impacts on the local transportation industry, water supply and irrigation systems, and offices of lawyers. According to Woodring, “We were very strongly focused on just what Progress Energy was going to need, so it's good to think outside of that [to] the other areas that are going to be impacted.”

Next the workforce board and other planners are working to determine which programs could be adjusted or created to fit the need for well-trained energy workers and other support occupations. Their evaluation included training at both the community college and high school levels. They found that the closest relevant plant operations program was at Indian River State College in Fort Pierce, about a two-hour drive from Ocala.

---

<sup>1</sup><http://www.ocala.com/article/20090309/ARTICLES/903091011/1402/NEWS?Title=Homeowners-struggle-to-keep-up>

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App\\_mode=Display\\_Statute&Search\\_String=&URL=Ch1003/Sec493.H TM](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=Ch1003/Sec493.H TM)



### Outcome

These findings led the workforce board and the three rural high school districts to focus on designing training programs that will supply local talent to the expanding energy industry and supporting industry sectors. According to Woodring, with the workforce and economic groups closely monitoring local development trends, and the high schools staying up-to-date with local training needs, the region now has a highly productive process that should help local industry and the local workforce.

The plan is for academies to be tied to programs at both Lake City Community College and CFCC so students will already have credit when they enroll. “We have some academies where when they graduate from high school, they’ve already completed half of their freshman year of college,” Woodring says. CFCC is also working on the development of a plant operations curriculum, which will merge with an existing engineering program, to open avenues for potential nuclear careers.

In addition, CLM Workforce Connection received an \$860,000 National Emergency Grant from the U.S. Department of Labor to help dislocated manufacturing workers. Part of the money, according to Woodring, will be directed at providing assistance for college tuition. “We’ll try to push for training that will support the growth from nuclear,” she says, “and also healthcare, pretty much our only other industry that is growing.”

### References and further reading

[“Progress Energy Florida names potential nuclear plant site in Levy County”](http://www.progress-energy.com), progress-energy.com

For more on the National Emergency Grant: <http://www.clmworkforce.com/news.asp?action=view&id=68>

### About EMSI

Economic Modeling Specialists Inc. (EMSI) is a professional services firm that offers integrated regional data, web-based analysis tools, data-driven reports, and custom consulting services. EMSI has served thousands of workforce, education, economic development, and other policy professionals in the U.S., Canada, and the United Kingdom, and the company’s web-based **Strategic Advantage** research and analysis suite is used by over 2,500 professionals across the U.S. For more information, call (866) 999-3674 or visit [www.economicmodeling.com](http://www.economicmodeling.com).