

# **Dr. Luis G. Pedraja: Workforce training and reskilling essential to economic recovery**

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As we begin to see the return to normal, or rather a new normal, rebounding from the last 14 months will take a concerted effort. Our entire community must pull together if we are to realize a lasting economic recovery. There is a workforce shortage, an ongoing global health crisis, the loss of many small businesses, and a labor pool not adequately trained for the challenges that lie ahead.

The global marketplace has shifted in ways unimaginable 14 months ago due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Having a trained workforce that can pivot to disruptions in the marketplace can mean the difference between success and failure for a company, the livelihood of employees and their families, and our economic recovery or downfall.

The key to a successful recovery means educating our workforce with the skills needed in a pandemic and post-pandemic world. The American Society for Training and Development researched over 2,500 firms and found companies that offered comprehensive training realized a 24% higher profit margin than companies that spent less on training.

One of the best ways our economy can get back on track is by increased workforce training and there is no better vehicle to offer this training than a local community college. Community colleges understand the need for this type of workforce education and are already proficient in training and upskilling workers to succeed in an ever-changing marketplace.

At Quinsigamond Community College's Center for Workforce Development and Continuing Education (CWDCE), we have been offering affordable,

professional development, career and employee training options for decades, making a positive difference in the local economy.

The need to train workers to meet the demands of a rapidly changing economy only increased in recent months, and exacerbated the need to be innovative in order to reach those hardest hit by the pandemic.

Prior to the pandemic, QCC's CWDCE was already offering relevant career, professional and workforce training to keep our economy flourishing. Yet we knew we needed to do more as the massive job loss our nation experienced in March and April 2020 alone, had no precedent since the end of World War II.

We took the unprecedented approach of offering free online learning opportunities and resources, designed to address the needs of companies and their workforce in this new and evolving landscape at the onset of the pandemic.

Our CWDCE offered free training classes for members of the community, including a free infectious disease control class, which drew 400 healthcare professionals and first responders, and 20 free online business courses. As we began preparing for the post-pandemic future, we knew it was imperative to continue offering additional free training to aid in our community's economic recovery.

In 2021, the CWDCE began offering a free, grant-funded Nurse Assistant/Home Health Aide program funded through the Executive Office of Health and Human Services Nursing and Allied Health Initiative, SNAP Path to Work. We also are offering an Administrative Medical Professional program to prepare students for a career as a medical administrative assistant, with funding provided by Senator Kenneth J. Donnelly Workforce Success Grants for Expanded Training Capacity & Employment Program Performance.

The programs not only offer free tuition, but also stipends for books, supplies and local job placement. Thanks to these types of free training programs, needed workers can enter the local workforce, assisting in our economy's growth.

QCC's Career Services partners with area companies that are looking for skilled workers, assisting with recruitment and job placement. These companies know they can come to QCC to find the workers they need to keep their businesses thriving.

Additionally, QCC's Credit for Prior Learning plays an important role in getting workers back into the workforce sooner, by recognizing that students may be able to earn college credit for learning acquired through life experiences.

The Commonwealth has also recognized the value of workforce development and upskilling of its citizen and through the Commonwealth Corporation, a state agency that fosters partnerships between industry, education and workforce organizations; it provides funds to Massachusetts employers through the Workforce Training Fund. Each year the Workforce Training Fund provides between \$10 and \$15 million in training grants to Massachusetts employers for the training of current and newly hired employees.

The pandemic has shown us that strategically investing in employee training and reskilling workers to meet the need of today's and tomorrow's global workforce is the only way we can all prosper. Investing in our community through workforce training is not something new at QCC. It is what we have always done and why we are such a valued member of Worcester and its surrounding communities.

Today over 34,000 QCC alumni play a major role in our community's prosperity by living and working here. They shored up our region when we

were in the thick of the pandemic, and will be part of the solution as we head to the next stage in our economic recovery.

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