

A scenic view of a mountain range with colorful autumn foliage in the foreground and a clear blue sky. The foreground is dominated by trees with vibrant orange, red, and green leaves. In the background, a series of blue-toned mountain peaks stretch across the horizon under a clear, light blue sky.

**High Country
Workforce Development Board
October 2011**

Building an adaptive workforce system to meet the needs of a globally competitive economy



Thursday, October 20, 2011, 10:30 AM

**Combined Meeting of the Business Services and JobLink Services Committees
with Youth Council**

Meeting Agenda

Call to Order

Workforce and Committee Updates:

- ◆ Update on Letters of Intent for adult/dislocated worker and youth services (p. 3, October 2011 Board Book)
- ◆ PY 2010 Performance Report (p. 4, Oct. Board Book)
- ◆ Soliciting suggestions for OJT outreach
- ◆ Customer surveys and secret shopper preliminary information
- ◆ JobLink locations and other changes:
 - Wilkes redesign, ESC move
 - Spruce Pine, partnership with Mayland
 - Ashe: exploring options
 - Watauga: exploring options
- ◆ Labor Market information exchange w/dialogue with private/public sector perspectives
- ◆ Jacob Clark hired as permanent FT Energy Sector Specialist
- ◆ **Strategic Planning Retreat on November 10th, 11 AM- 4:00 PM**, Jackalope's Restaurant at Archer's Mountain Inn. More information to follow.
 - * Suggestions for Strategic Planning Retreat topics
 - * Proposed organization of the day
- ◆ Other business

12 Noon: Adjournment and lunch

High Country Workforce Development Board
Business Services/JobLink Services/Youth Council
Joint Committee Meeting Notes

October 20, 2011, 10:30 AM

Present:

Business Services - Barbara Barlow, Jason Carlton, Skip Greene, Clark Hunter, Sam Ray, Earl Tipton

JobLink Services - Mike Birkmire

Youth Council - Jayne Phipps Boger, Anne Bowlin, John Boyd, Kim Cashatt, Marie Gwyn, Jennie Harpold, Carolyn McKinney, Stacy Sears, Sallie Woodring

Other Members/Staff - Bryan Peterson, Misty Bishop-Price, Rebecca Bloomquist, Jacob Clark, Don Sherrill, Adrian Tait, MaryAnn Urka

Key Subjects Under Consideration:

- Letters of Intent Update
- PY 2010 Performance Report
- JobLink Analysis and related issues
- Upcoming Strategic Planning Retreat

Current Situation:

- Misty Bishop-Price updated Board members on the status of Letters of Intent received for WIA Services to Adults, Dislocated Workers and Youth for PY 2012.
- Staff review of all workforce development policy documents is in progress, to insure currency and accuracy.
- Don Sherrill reviewed PY 2010 WIA Common Performance Measure Outcomes, emphasizing that High Country local area achieved its performance outcomes and is eligible for performance incentive funds. Staff and service providers will work to improve PY 2011 outcomes for those measures below expected performance. Mr. Sherrill also reported that High Country workforce service providers have served 37 customers with funding from the On-the-Job Training National Emergency Grant (OJT/NEG), and efforts continue toward the targeted goal of 70 participants.
- Suggestions for communicating and connecting eligible dislocated workers with local businesses included: using chambers of commerce to distribute information to employers, calling employers to inform them of the services, requirements, and expectations, and continued newspaper coverage of OJT activities.
- Rebecca Bloomquist presented a summary of the customer survey and secret shopper initiatives within local area JobLink Centers, and reviewed the completed JobLink Analysis Report.
- Adrian Tait updated the Board on potential adoption of the "Burning Glass" workforce application software for local JobLink Centers. ASU Department of Interior Design Students are currently working on their submissions for the redesign of the Wilkes JobLink Center. Ashe JobLink Center is searching for a more accessible location. Spruce Pine and Mayland Community College have partnered in the search for a new location.
- Jacob Clark was hired as permanent FT Energy Sector Specialist
- **Reminder:** WDB Strategic Planning Retreat on November 10th. More information to follow.

Next Steps:

Staff will develop a response tool for interested bidders of WIA services.

The next meeting of the Business Services and JobLink Services Committees will be held on Thursday, January 12, 2012, at 10:30 AM. A casual luncheon will follow, with Youth Council scheduled to meet at 1:00 PM.

PY 2012 Letter of Intent for WIA Services
 High Country Local Area
 Responses Received

County	Youth	Adult/Dislocated Worker
Alleghany	Wilkes CC	Wilkes CC
Ashe	Wilkes CC	Wilkes CC
Avery	Mayland CC	Mayland CC
Mitchell	Mayland CC	Mayland CC
Watauga	Caldwell CC	Caldwell CC
Wilkes	Wilkes CC	Wilkes CC
Yancey	Mayland CC	Mayland CC

PY 2011 Current
 WIA Service Providers

County	Youth	Adult/Dislocated Worker
Alleghany	High Country COG	Wilkes CC
Ashe	High Country COG	Wilkes CC
Avery	Mayland CC	Mayland CC
Mitchell	Mayland CC	Mayland CC
Watauga	High Country COG	Mayland CC
Wilkes	High Country COG	Wilkes CC
Yancey	Mayland CC	Mayland CC

**Program Year 2010 Final Report
September 7, 2011**

HIGH COUNTRY

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Performance Measure	Program Group	Actual	2010 Goals	Variance	Numerator Denominator	
Total Exitors	Adults	327				
	Dislocated Workers	241				
	Younger Youth (14-18)	40				
	Older Youth (19-21)	33				
Entered Employment Rate	Adults	65.08%	75.4%	86.34%	164	252
	Dislocated Workers	77.12%	83.4%	92.44%	209	271
Retention Rate	Adults	87.43%	82.2%	106.30%	146	167
	Dislocated Workers	86.43%	90.0%	96.01%	121	140
Adult/DW Average Earnings	Adults	\$11,372.53	\$10,159.13	111.94%	\$1,660,389.64	146
	Dislocated Workers	\$12,784.77	\$11,320.00	112.94%	\$1,546,956.59	121
Youth (14-21) Common Measures						
Placement in Employment or Education	Youth 14-21	45.76%	62.16%	73.62%	27	59
					22	63
Attainment of a Degree or Certificate	Youth 14-21	34.92%	49.77%	70.16%	15	51
					15	51
Numeracy/Literacy	Youth 14-21	29.41%	32.88%	89.45%	15	51
					15	51

Statutory Measures - For Informational Purposes Only

Entered Employment Rate	Older Youth (19-21)	39.29%	N/A	N/A	11	28
					12	12
Retention Rate	Older Youth (19-21)	100.00%	N/A	N/A	13	27
					13	27
OY Six Months-Earnings Change	Older Youth (19-21)	\$6,448.13	N/A	N/A	\$77,377.52	12
					197	331
Credential and Employment	Adults	59.52%	N/A	N/A	144	242
					144	242
Credential Rate	Older Youth (19-21)	23.08%	N/A	N/A	9	39
					9	39
Diploma or Equivalent Rate	Younger Youth	57.14%	N/A	N/A	12	21
					12	21
Skill (Goal) Attainment Rate	Younger Youth	53.09%	N/A	N/A	43	81
					43	81



Special Meeting Agenda
September 8, 2011, 12:00 noon

This special meeting of the High Country Workforce Development Board has been convened for the purpose of presenting an overview of the DRAFT **2011 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Performance Report**.

Call to Order: Marie Gwyn, Youth Council Chair

Presentation: Overview of the 2011 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Performance Report - Phil Trew, COG Director of Planning

Workforce Update: Adrian Tait, Director, Workforce Development

Adjournment



Special Meeting Minutes
September 8, 2011, 12:00 noon

Call to Order: by Youth Council Chair Marie Gwyn at 12:15 PM.

CEDS Report Overview: Phil Trew, COG Director of Planning

Following his summary of the 2011 CEDS Performance Report, Mr. Trew requested Board approval of the draft document.

A motion from the floor to accept the 2011 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Performance Report was unanimously approved.

Mr. Trew concluded his presentation with information on the "NC Tomorrow" initiative, now underway. A steering committee of representatives from all seven COG member counties is in the process of formation, to provide input for a complete revision of the CEDS plan for 2012.

Workforce Update: Director Adrian Tait provided a briefing on the progress of OJT/NEG (On-the-Job Training/National Emergency Grant) placements. Tait also announced the date of the Board's Strategic Planning Retreat, November 10, 2011.

Motion to adjourn was seconded at 1:32 PM.

High Country Workforce Development Board
Special Meeting Attendance - September 8, 2011

%	Name	Oct. 2010	Dec. 2010	Feb. 2011	Apr. 2011	Jun. 2011	Aug. 2011	Sept. 2011
72%	Barbara Barlow							
72%	Mike Birkmire							
86%	Anne Bowlin							
100%	Jason Carlton (Jamie Phillips (6/10 -6/11))							
43%	David Edwards							
72%	Skip Greene							
86%	Marie Gwyn							
	Alleghany County Vacancy (formerly Jim Halsey)							
57%	Fonda Harris							
57%	Dwayne Howell							
84%	Clark Hunter (11/10-) Scott Moncrief (6/06-9/10)							
43%	Joallen Lowder							
	Mitchell Co. Vacancy (formerly Dr. Charley Nash)							
86%	Bryan Peterson							
88%	Jayne Phipps-Boger							
50%	Wanda Proffitt (11/10-)							
86%	Sam Ray							
	Watauga Co. Vacancy (formerly Sandy Reese)							
57%	Truman Robbins							
86%	Stacy Sears							
100%	Earl Tipton							
57%	Don Williams							
86%	Sallie Woodring							
		58%	83%	69%	52%	83%	62%	65%

Youth Council Members Present:

Jennie Harpold

Present
Absent
Vacant



Youth Council Meeting Minutes

September 8, 2011, 1:00 PM

ATTENDANCE: Marie Gwyn, Anne Bowlin, Sallie Woodring, Jennie Harpold, Stacy Sears, Joallen Lowder; staff Misty Bishop-Price, Don Sherrill and Adrian Tait.

KEY SUBJECTS UNDER CONSIDERATION: Review of June 9, 2011 minutes; PY2012 WIA procurement; WDB vision and strategies discussion.

BACKGROUND: Youth Council continues to oversee and review youth services across the region.

CURRENT SITUATION: Members reviewed the June 9th, 2011 meeting minutes, which were approved as submitted.

Discussion was held regarding procurement of WIA services for PY2012. An overview of current youth providers was shared which is currently High Country Council of Governments (Alleghany, Ashe, Watauga, and Wilkes) and Mayland Community College (Avery, Mitchell, Yancey). Due to lack of previous competition in previous years, the Letter of Intent process will be used to determine interest of potential organizations that may bid on WIA funding. Staff will move forward with advertising the Letter of Intent process and will report at the October meeting any responses received and determine next steps.

Discussion was held regarding the upcoming WDB strategic planning process to include the use of data driven decisions; use of technology; communications and marketing; and advancing the local Career Center system. WDB staff are currently reviewing the financial processes of providers and how these processes can be streamlined and automated to allow for quicker, more detailed reporting and analysis. Burning Glass, a labor market information exchange system, is also being explored as the use of a local and statewide system.

NEXT STEPS: Continue procurement process for WIA youth services.

DRAFT High Country Workforce Development Board Meeting **DRAFT**

August 11, 2011

MINUTES

Call to Order: by Chairman Peterson at 3:03 PM.

Members Present: Barbara Barlow, Anne Bowlin, Jason Carlton, Kim Cashatt, David Edwards, Marie Gwyn, Jenny Harpold, Fonda Harris, Clark Hunter, Bryan Peterson, Wanda Proffitt, Sam Ray, Sandy Reese, Earl Tipton, Sallie Woodring

Staff: Misty Bishop-Price, Rebecca Bloomquist, Jacob Clark, Heather Kersey, Don Sherrill, Adrian Tait, MaryAnn Urka

Guests: John Greene, Rick Herndon, Patrick McKemie, Mike Pierce, Ginger Shaffer, Pam Wilson

Consideration of Minutes: Earl Tipton moved to approve the minutes of the June 9, 2011 meeting as submitted. Seconded by Sam Ray. The Chairman announced that a statistical correction to the originally printed **High Country Labor Market Information**, under "Occupations with Most Want Ads" (p. 19, Board Book) had been made by MaryAnn Urka, and was reflected in the current electronic version on the WDB website.

Following approval of the June 9th, 2011 minutes, Mr. Peterson welcomed Jason Carlton, owner of GoWilkes, to the WDB and administered the Oath of Office. He then requested Board members to briefly review the **Code of Conduct** policy (August Board Book, p. 5) on disclosure of conflicts of interest. No conflicts of interest were reported.

Committee Reports

Executive (p. 7): The Chair reported that the Executive Committee met today at 1:00 PM, during which time the PY 2011 meeting schedule and committee assignments were approved. In place of the Adult Services/JobLink committee, two new committees have been formed; Business Services and JobLink Services. The JobLink Services Committee will address both adult and youth customer service issues.

Youth Council (p. 9): Marie Gwyn reported that Debbie Ewald succeeds Sherri Dees as the new Get REAL Youth Coach, upon Ms. Dees' acceptance of an offer of employment from Avante Group in Wilkes County. The Youth Council will also begin preparation for issuing a Request for Proposal (RFP) for PY 2012 Get REAL service providers.

Adult Services/JobLink: Board staff member Don Sherrill reported on 2010 WIA performance measures (p. 8).

Information

Workforce Update: Workforce Director Adrian Tait announced the upcoming 2011 Workforce Development Partnership Conference in Greensboro, Oct. 11-14, inviting interested Board members to contact him for further information. The Regional Innovation Grant (RIG), which funded the "Get **NOT** Out of Your Life" campaign, is approaching its end. Stating the need to investigate alternative funding sources, Tait announced that he and staff member Don Sherrill will be attending a Rural Center grant information session later in the month. Tait also reported that JobLink customer survey responses indicated a need to focus more on decision making that is based on accurate data.

Construction Industry Report (pp. 12-15): WD intern, **Heather Kersey**, presented a brief summary of her work on "*Potential Impacts of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy of a Declining Construction Industry*". The full report will form part of the revised **High Country State of the Workforce Report**.

Energy Sector Partnership Grant Update (pp. 16-17): Energy Sector Specialist **Jacob Clark** summarized recent activities, highlighting several initiatives underway. In addition to providing training for contractors, the SESP grant has provided funding for development of a "Green Valuation Specialist Program", and National Association of Realtors "Green Designation". To date, 32 local realtors have

received this designation, with another 40 expected to follow by the end of August. Local plumbers will soon begin training in North Carolina's new water conservation and efficiency standards, which become effective in January 2012. The Future Forward Workforce Alliance continues to streamline the collaborative process, and is in discussion of job creation within renewable energy markets.

JobLink Report Overview: Special Projects Coordinator **Rebecca Bloomquist** presented an overview of the comprehensive JobLink Report. Publication of the full report, **JobLink Career Centers: An Analysis**, is expected to be completed by October 2011.

Member Industry Sector Discussion: Members participated in an informal discussion of the current workforce climate, identifying various employer challenges and opportunities. At the forefront of discussion were issues such as finding qualified employees, making good employer/employee matches, use of social media in outreach, cost management, dialogue with school boards, and developing positive cultural regard for education.

Adjournment: Motion to adjourn was seconded at 4:20 PM.

The next meeting of the High Country Workforce Development Board will be a Strategic Planning Retreat, scheduled for Nov. 10th, from 11 AM-4 PM. More information to follow.

High Country Workforce Development Board
Meeting Attendance - August 11, 2011

%	Name	Aug. 2010	Oct. 2010	Dec. 2010	Feb. 2011	Apr. 2011	Jun. 2011	Aug. 2011
67%	Barbara Barlow							
67%	Mike Birkmire							
67%	Anne Bowlin							
100%	Jason Carlton (Jamie Phillips (6/10 -6/11)							
67%	David Edwards							
67%	Skip Greene							
83%	Marie Gwyn							
	Allegheny County Vacancy (formerly Jim Halsey)							
84%	Fonda Harris							
50%	Dwayne Howell							
100%	Clark Hunter (11/10-) Scott Moncrief (6/06-9/10)							
33%	Joallen Lowder							
	Mitchell Co. Vacancy (formerly Dr. Charley Nash)							
100%	Bryan Peterson							
88%	Jayne Phipps-Boger							
50%	Wanda Proffitt (11/10-)							
84%	Sam Ray							
50%	Sandra Reese							
67%	Truman Robbins							
67%	Stacy Sears							
100%	Earl Tipton							
75%	Don Williams (6/10-)							
84%	Sallie Woodring							
		78%	58%	83%	69%	52%	83%	62%

Youth Council Members Present:

Kim Cashatt
 Jennie Harpold

LEGEND	
	Present
	Absent
	Vacant

High Country Workforce Development Board
Executive Committee Meeting Notes

August 11, 2011, 1:00 PM

Present: Marie Gwyn, Fonda Harris, Bryan Peterson, Sandy Reese, staff members Adrian Tait and MaryAnn Urka

Key Subjects Under Consideration:

- WDB Meeting Schedule
- WDB Committee Reorganization

Background: The Executive Committee is composed of officers, committee chairs, and other members designated by the Chair. It is empowered to act on the Board's behalf between board meetings, subject to the Board's guidance.

Current Situation:

- Executive Committee approved formation of a Business Services Committee and a JobLink Services Committee. Newly formed committees replace Adult Services/JobLink, and will address both adult and youth customer service issues.
- In addition to director's update on special grants, local area construction industry report and Energy Sector Partnership Grant update to be presented at today's WDB meeting.
- JobLink Report overview of in-progress study to be presented at today's WDB meeting.
- Member industry sector updates to expand into open discussion period.
- Planning underway for WDB Strategic Planning Retreat on Nov. 10th.
- Debbie Ewald succeeds Sherri Dees as new Get REAL Youth Coach.
- Youth Council to begin preparation of Request for Proposal for PY 2012 Get REAL service providers.
- Southern Industrial Constructors (Ashe County) awarded Incumbent Worker Grant.
- End of the Regional Innovation Grant (RIG) planning phase is approaching.
- At the request of the NC Workforce Directors Council, Adrian Tait is investigating customer-friendly software applications for possible future deployment in local area JobLink Career Centers. Executive Committee members expressed support for this project, and agreed on the need to consider alternatives.
- Adrian Tait and Don Sherrill attending August Rural Center informational meeting on potential implementation grant program.

Next Steps: Implement new meeting schedule, with JobLink Services and Business Services committees meeting at 10:30 AM, casual luncheon at 12 noon, followed by Youth Council meeting at 1:00 PM, on Sept. 8, 2011.

The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be held by teleconference on Thursday, November 3rd at 4:00 PM.

High Country
Workforce Development Consortium Meeting
September 21, 2011, 11:30 AM
Sagebrush Steakhouse, Boone, NC

MINUTES

Members Present: Keith Elmore, Nathan Miller, Judy Porter Poe, Kenny Poteat, Ken Richardson, Johnny Riddle, Bill Slagle

Guests: Nathan Bennett, Deron Geouque, Rick Herndon, Pat Mitchell, Nathan Miller, Chuck Vines, John Yates

Others: WDB staff Adrian Tait, MaryAnn Urka

Meeting was called to order by CEO Kenny Poteat at 11:50 AM.

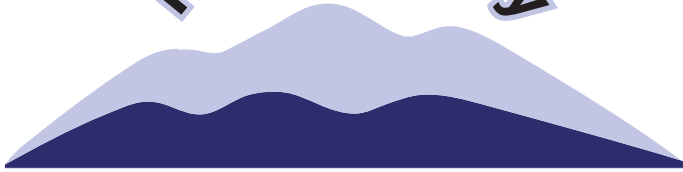
Mr. Poteat introduced Adrian Tait as High Country Workforce Development Board's new Director, succeeding Carole Coates.

Director Tait presented an update on current Workforce Development initiatives and activities:

- Strategic Energy Sector Partnership (SESP) grant
- On-the-Job Training/National Emergency Grant (OJT/NEG) placements
- NC Division of Workforce Development 's acceptance of the High Country Local Area's 2011 WIA Annual Plan
- Sept. 8, 2011 WD Board's special meeting to review and accept the 2011 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Performance Report.
- High Country Workforce Development Board will hold its Strategic Planning Retreat on November 10, 2011.

The date of the next Workforce Development Consortium meeting has been set for Wednesday, January 25, 2012. More information to follow.

High Country



Workforce Development Board

Labor Market Information Update

October 2011

Civilian Labor Force Estimates* (Not Seasonally Adjusted)

		August 2011	July 2011	August 2010
Alleghany	Labor Force	4,685	4,568	4,766
	Employed	4,162	4,057	4,295
	Unemployed	523	511	471
	Rate %	11.2	11.2	9.9
Ashe	Labor Force	12,185	12,015	12,448
	Employed	10,882	10,642	11,079
	Unemployed	1,303	1,373	1,369
	Rate %	10.7	11.4	11.0
Avery	Labor Force	8,055	8,160	7,981
	Employed	7,240	7,337	7,237
	Unemployed	815	823	744
	Rate %	10.1	10.1	9.3
Mitchell	Labor Force	6,677	6,627	6,893
	Employed	5,908	5,846	6,166
	Unemployed	769	781	727
	Rate %	11.5	11.8	10.5
Watauga	Labor Force	24,332	24,697	23,687
	Employed	22,388	22,733	21,910
	Unemployed	1,944	1,964	1,777
	Rate %	8.0	8.0	7.5
Wilkes	Labor Force	29,408	29,523	29,113
	Employed	25,840	25,925	25,283
	Unemployed	3,568	3,598	3,830
	Rate %	12.1	12.2	13.2
Yancey	Labor Force	7,456	7,225	7,629
	Employed	6,590	6,359	6,830
	Unemployed	866	866	799
	Rate %	11.6	12.0	10.5
High Country	Labor Force	92,798	92,815	92,517
	Employed	83,010	82,899	82,800
	Unemployed	9,788	9,916	9,717
	Rate %	10.5	10.7	10.5
Statewide	Labor Force	4,510,234	4,559,191	4,502,867
	Employed	4,038,915	4,084,865	4,048,649
	Unemployed	471,319	474,326	454,218
	Rate %	10.4	10.4	10.1

Source: LAUS, LMID

*August 2011 data are preliminary, while July 2011 data are revised and August 2010 data are benchmarked.

Quick Facts:

North Carolina Unemployment Rates August 2011

Seasonally Adjusted: 10.4

Not Seasonally Adjusted: 10.4

Source: LAUS, LMID

NC UI Average Weekly Benefit August 2011: \$280.48

NC Maximum Weekly Benefit Amount August 2011: \$522

Source: WRER, LMID

Gender of Initial Claims High Country WDB* August 2011

Male: 63%

Female: 37%

Source: WRER, LMID

*May not sum due to rounding and unreported category.

Age Ranges of Initial Claimants High Country WDB* August 2011

16-19 — 1%

20-24 — 10%

25-34 — 19%

35-44 — 21%

45-54 — 26%

55-64 — 19%

65+ — 4%

Source: WRER, LMID

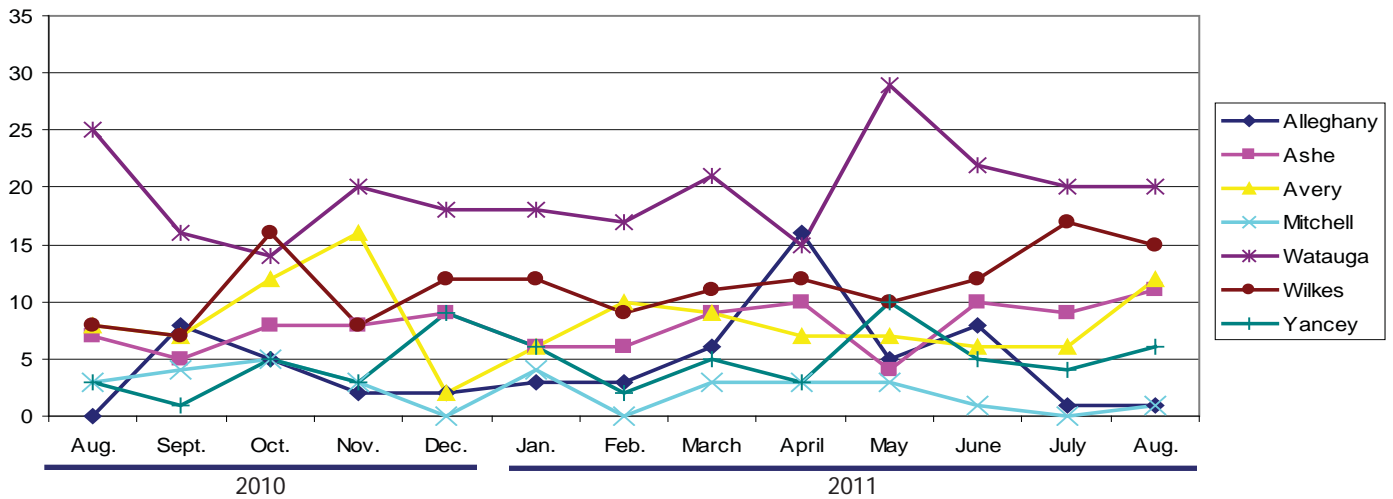
*May not sum due to rounding and unreported category.

Individuals Receiving Benefits

	August 2011	August 2010
Alleghany	122	187
Ashe	382	446
Avery	166	230
Mitchell	191	198
Watauga	302	432
Wilkes	807	1,354
Yancey	175	181
Statewide	112,015	133,061

Source: WRER, LMID

New Corporations



Source: Department of the NC Secretary of State

Duration of Benefits By County 12-Month Period Ending*

	Aug. 31, 2011	Aug. 31, 2010
Alleghany	15.3	15.6
Ashe	15.3	18.0
Avery	14.9	16.9
Mitchell	14.1	17.0
Watauga	16.7	17.3
Wilkes	13.6	18.1
Yancey	13.1	15.1
Statewide	16.4	18.4

*Duration is the number of weeks compensated for the year divided by the number of first payments.

Unemployment Insurance Claims August 2011

	Initial Claims	Benefits Paid
Alleghany	53	\$75,835
Ashe	243	\$278,027
Avery	91	\$128,694
Mitchell	86	\$172,069
Watauga	179	\$299,587
Wilkes	526	\$666,874
Yancey	113	\$176,927
Statewide	52,821	\$117,987,637

Source: WRER, LMID

High Country WDB Occupations With the Most Ads* August 2011

Occupation	Volume
Registered Nurses	74
Customer Service Representatives	45
Physical Therapists	42
Occupational Therapists	38
First-Line Supervisors/Managers of Retail Sales Workers	35
Truck Drivers, Heavy and Tractor-Trailer	27
Nursing Aides, Orderlies, and Attendants	25
Retail Salespersons	23
First-Line Supervisors/Managers of Food Preparation and Serving Workers	21
Personal and Home Care Aides	21
Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products	20
Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	19

Source: The Conference Board Help Wanted OnLine

*Data represents labor demand, measured by online advertised vacancies. Data is revised.

Labor Market Information Division
Employment Security Commission of North Carolina
P.O. Box 25903 Raleigh, 27611
Phone: (919) 733-2936 Fax: (919) 733-8662
Email: esc.lmi.inquiries@ncesc.gov Website: www.ncesc.com



New solar farm provides energy, jobs and training for Avery County

Matthew Hundley / matthew.hundley@averyjournal.com

In early July, construction began on a solar farm, or solar array, outside the Town of Crossnore, on Trim Branch Road. The solar farm, which was constructed across six acres of farmland, consists of hundreds of solar panels mounted on frames and are ideally positioned to absorb the sun's rays, converting them into electricity and providing energy for local homes. O2 Energies coordinated the project, hiring Strata Solar to train workers and complete the installation of the panels. Strata Solar needed specially trained laborers for the various aspects of solar panel installation.



Specially trained workers install state-of-the-art solar panels.

Photo by Matthew Hundley

Because no such workforce existed here in Avery County, Strata Solar collaborated with Mayland Community College in order to select and train a group of capable local men and women for the specific skills needed for the job. In all, Strata Solar has employed 15 individuals, not to mention the various sub-contractors who were required for various aspects of the project. Besides a job, Strata Solar also provided those individuals with training.

John Morrison, the project's chief operating officer, explained that the company's goal was to establish a qualified work force across the state, ensuring that future projects could move forward.

To accomplish this, they had to train their new employees. Coordinating with Mayland Community College, the company provided free training, not only in the technical aspects of installing solar panels, but also in OSEA standards, in which every worker received certification. Even when the solar farm is complete, workers will have additional opportunities because they will then qualify to sit for the NABCEP (North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners) exam, which will open up future opportunities in the growing solar energy industry. Morrison hopes that the skills and training that the workforce receives will enable them to work for future O2 Energies or Strata Solar projects. Morrison explained that the Avery County workforce will be highly capable, as each member has had at least some experience with every aspect of solar panel installation, ensuring that they will be prepared for future jobs.

The solar farm, which will be capable, at peak conditions, of producing one megawatt of clean, carbon-free energy per hour, should be completed by mid- to late-August.

Morrison predicted that more solar arrays will be cropping up across the country in light of the dropping cost of solar panels. Recent advances and continued research into the production of solar panels has forced the price to drop more than 60 percent during the past three years, and will probably continue to force down prices in the near future.

Wind Matters: Hardin, student bring wind power to Avery High School

Matthew Hundley / matthew.hundley@averyjournal.com

Thanks to a combination of federal, state and educational programs, Avery High School will soon feature a functioning wind turbine. The immediate function of the turbine, which will stand a full 44-feet high, with a 12-foot spread on the rotation of the blades, will simply be to feed electricity back into the Mountain Electric grid. In the future, this energy will be calculated and added together with output from other turbines established through school systems to demonstrate the efficacy of wind power as a viable alternative energy source. Further down the line, the turbine will be used to provide power for a series of greenhouses, which are also slated to be constructed on the Avery High School campus in the future for use by horticulture classes.



Hank Hardin guides student Luke Hayes through building a working miniature wind turbine.
Photo by Matthew Hundley

Avery County rests in one of the most wind-rich areas of North Carolina. The danger in fact, is not that there will not be enough wind, but that the wind will be too violent, damaging the turbine. Fortunately, the turbine is equipped with technology to ensure that if wind speeds grow too high, the turbine will automatically turn itself away, so that the blades and other mechanisms are not damaged. The turbine blades, which are each six feet long, include a special, curved shape that is designed specifically to minimize sound, ensuring that the operating turbine will not disturb classes.

The turbine will be placed unobtrusively behind the school. It will stand behind the ROTC climbing tower, next to the tennis courts that are currently under construction behind the football stadium's press box. This placement will ensure that the turbine does not interfere with classes or sports events. While the actual construction of the turbine will be handled by an outside company, students in Hank Hardin's class will be studying the mechanics of wind turbines. Through the help of Appalachian State University, these students have been building miniature wind turbines. With their own wind turbines, students will work to understand and identify the criteria for maximum efficiency in a wind turbine. By manipulating the pitch, surface area, mass and number of blades, then testing the effect of these variables on the efficiency and electrical output of the turbines, students will learn principles of physics and engineering far beyond those available to students at most high schools.

Hardin came to Avery County Schools in 1988. In the 23 years he has served Avery County's students, Hardin has introduced students to a wide variety of hands-on projects designed to give them first-hand experience with advanced physics and engineering projects. Just last year, students built an electricity-

free water pump, which, when combined with a student-made water filter, could transport potable drinking water uphill from a source of falling water. The year before, students used aluminum cans to create a highly effective passive-solar heat sink, which trapped solar energy in order to heat water. One of the first projects that Hardin challenged students with when he came to Avery County High School was the creation of a solar powered vehicle. The combined effort of Hardin's principles of technology class, shop class, and other departments produced the electric car in 1989. In the years since, Hardin has also guided students through his CET and Networking classes, which provide students with practical, useful skills in the fields of computer repair, construction, programming and networking. In fact, students in Hardin's classroom built most of the computers being used throughout Avery County Schools. Hardin's latest contribution, the wind turbine, will be constructed in September. Look to a future issue of The Avery Journal-Times for future coverage of the project.

Visit the High Country Workforce Development Board Website

In addition to High Country Workforce Development Board and Consortium information, be sure to check the **“Calendar of Events”** for current meetings/events, and **“Headlines”** for local area workforce development news articles.

For more information on local area JobLink Centers, click on www.highcountrywdb.com and select **“JobLink Career Centers”** from the menu at the left of the web page.

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