

University officials address worker shortage, solutions in panel discussion

Waukesha Mayor's Breakfast held Tuesday



Nikki Brahm/Freeman Staff

The business panel at the Waukesha Mayor's Breakfast included (from left) Keri Duce, UWM's director of external and governmental relations; Simon Bronner, UWM's dean of the College of General Studies; Richard Barnhouse, Waukesha County Technical College president; and Cindy Gnadinger, Carroll University president.

By Nikki Brahm
 nbrahm@conley.net.com
 262-513-2651

WAUKESHA — The Waukesha County Business Alliance (WCBA) and university officials from UW-Milwaukee (UWM), Carroll University and Waukesha County Technical College (WCTC) discussed addressing the worker shortage with higher education at the Mayor's Breakfast on Tuesday morning.

Community members were invited to attend the Mayor's Breakfast at Tuscan Hall Venue

& Catering, 409 Delafield St.

Robyn Ludtke, vice president, talent development of the Waukesha County Business Alliance, presented the panel on Tuesday. Speakers included Cindy Gnadinger, Carroll University president; Richard Barnhouse, Waukesha County Technical College president; Simon Bronner, UW-Milwaukee's dean of the College of General Studies; and Keri Duce, UWM's director of external and governmental relations.

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“For 140 years the business community has continuously told us we want to work on workforce, to be able to grow your business, that’s the one thing you need,” Ludtke said.

Ludtke said the Waukesha County Business Alliance has developed a workforce strategy, and they want to continue to help the business community attract, develop and retain talent. This can be done through partnerships — as the Waukesha County Business Alliance has developed relationships with every K-12 institution, she said.

First, panel speakers addressed what their universities are doing to address worker shortages.

At Carroll, Gnadinger said, the university is having conversations with local business leaders to see what exactly is needed, as well as monthly meetings with the Analytics and Business Intelligence Consortium, so the university knew a declining workforce was coming.

Carroll has added a new academic program each year to address needs within the curriculum. For example, Carroll’s largest program, the nursing program, has been expanded with an associate degree nursing program. In addition, the university has expanded new credential programs — such as business analytics — in order to address gaps.

Barnhouse said WCTC also meets with employers and has also noticed a “body problem,” as there are not enough students to deliver the needed workforce.

“One of the things that we’ve done is we’ve started a program called WCTC Accelerate, and that’s a program where any junior or senior in high school can come to WCTC full-time, transfer those credits back to their high school, and graduate their high school earning their associate degree in any field that we offer ... and join the workforce at the age of 18 or transfer on to one of our colleges as a junior at the age of 18,” Barnhouse said.



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Mayor Shawn Reilly speaks at the Mayor’s Breakfast on Tuesday.

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In addition, WCTC is working with businesses to develop an academic curriculum specifically designed for a company in order to meet their needs. These initiatives help students speed through the entry and exit of college, Barnhouse said.

At UW-Milwaukee and UW-Milwaukee at Waukesha, Duce said, UWM has partnerships with a variety of employers to create programming at UWM, such as the Northwestern Mutual data science initiative to create new bachelor’s and master’s degrees in the data science field. In addition, the UW System has a freshwater program to address state-wide water challenges.

UWM also works with Milwaukee Public Schools to help incoming students figure out what career they want to pursue to help them quickly achieve their goals.

Ludtke also had the panel address what the business community and the community at large can do to help.

Duce said at UWM, there are many nursing majors and there are long wait lists for nursing classes.

“At UWM that means we need to be able to invest in new facilities, this is a

complicated process at the state level that we go through every two years to really figure out how we can update and change our facilities by increased state bonding and state dollars,” Duce said. “So we need your help to advocate that those types of building projects are important and that that will help us provide more nurses to the community.”

In addition, scholarships and internships provided by local businesses also attract more students to the workforce, Duce said.

Bronner said transportation and housing are also a challenge, as 80% of UWM students also work.

Gnadinger also encourages businesses to consider creating an internship program.

“Just over 70% of our employers end up offering the interns that work for them a place (within) their workforce and nearly 80% of those students take those jobs,” she said. “Retention rates for those employees are extremely (high).”

Within Carroll, full-time recruiters are also in Phoenix and Minneapolis, bringing students to Waukesha. Carroll’s job is to make the students love Waukesha County so they don’t want to leave, Gnadinger said, so creating positive internships can do just that.

The next Mayor’s Breakfast will take place on Dec. 6.