

# Annual Report

Program Year 2023

July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024



*Serving Boone, Stephenson, and Winnebago Counties*

303 N. Main Street, Rockford, IL 61101

600 S. State Street, Belvidere, IL 61008

210 W. Spring Street, Freeport, IL 61032



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**Thank you to our sponsor:**



# What Is The Workforce Connection System?

The Workforce Connection system is the regional workforce system serving Boone, Stephenson and Winnebago counties in Illinois and is the foundation for the implementation of the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) for Local Workforce Innovation Area 3 (LWIA3). Guiding this system is our Local Workforce Innovation Board, which is made up of regional employers, educational institutions, economic development, public partners, and publicly elected officials. The Workforce Connection is a network of organizations delivering employment, education and training services.

## Our Mission

The Workforce Connection is committed to providing a workforce that meets the needs of the business community now and in the future.

## Our Vision

The Workforce Connection provides a fully integrated and accessible workforce development system that balances the needs of individuals and businesses to ensure our region has a skilled workforce to effectively compete in the global economy.



# A Year in Review from the Board Chair

This past year has provided The Workforce Connection countless opportunities to assist individuals and businesses throughout our workforce region. Here are some highlights from Program Year 2023:

- Fostered partnerships with local stakeholders to strengthen the regional workforce ecosystem.
- Successfully navigated challenges posed by changing workforce demands, ensuring continued support for job seekers and regional businesses.
- Developed and maintained a balanced WIOA compliant Local Workforce Innovation Board (LWIB) representative of the region's business community, consisting of many diverse industries.
- Achieved milestones in workforce training, equipping participants with essential skills for current and emerging industries.
  - \$5,432,366 spent on participant-related training
  - 524 individuals attended occupational training
  - 434 individuals earned a credential
  - 105 individuals earned their high school diploma or equivalency
  - Career Centers had 13,887 visits
  - Career Center staff held 555 hiring events, resulting in 3,053 interviews
- Supported individuals and businesses with training and upskilling.
  - \$1,020,097 spent on employer-related training as follows:
    - Incumbent Worker Training projects totaling \$175,776
    - Work Experience projects totaling \$509,849
    - On-The-Job Training projects totaling \$285,129
    - Apprenticeship projects totaling \$49,343
- Partnered with a regional business to craft a new registered apprenticeship, which came to fruition at the official apprenticeship signing press conference on June 5, 2024. This apprenticeship required collaboration between The Workforce Connection, Tad More Tailoring & Alterations, the U.S. Department of Labor, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, and state and local elected officials.
- Spearheaded a collaborative effort among multiple regional partners to secure Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA) grants for TWC and the project partners from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. These grants will enable the creation of training programs for individuals and assistance to businesses, with a focus on clean energy jobs creation and development.



*Michelle Cassaro*

Deputy Director of Finance and  
Administration  
Chicago Rockford International Airport

“

*I am grateful for the opportunity to serve as Board Chair and am immensely proud of the dedication and innovative collaborations demonstrated by the Board, leadership team, and our partners.*

Apprenticeship Work Based Learning  
Career Supportive Services On-The-Job Training  
Exploration Jobs Upskilling career Learning  
Incumbent Worker Training opportunity connections  
Work Experience Collaboration Training  
Pre-Apprenticeship Education Skills

# Chief Elected Officials' Chair Regional Workforce Development Update



*Thomas P. McNamara*  
Mayor  
City of Rockford



*“Economic development is essential to drive growth, create job opportunities and improve quality of life. In just three years, Rockford has added 7,000 new jobs, showcasing our commitment to a prosperous future.”*

Economic development is crucial for promoting progress, driving growth, creating job opportunities and improving quality of life. In July of 2023, Governor JB Pritzker's announcement of a partnership with the Illinois Department of Transportation and Metra to reinstate safe and reliable passenger rail service between Chicago and Rockford garnered significant attention. This initiative, set to begin in 2027, marks a pivotal step in energizing our city.

Additionally, President Biden's visit last fall celebrated Stellantis' decision to reinvest in our region. This \$5 billion project will create 5,000 jobs across the region. Furthering our economic momentum, real estate developer J. Jeffers initiated construction at Colman Yards, committing \$106 million to repurpose historic factory buildings into a mixed-use development.

PCI Pharma Services' expansion with two new facilities, totaling 500,000 square feet and investing hundreds of millions of dollars, will significantly bolster local employment and support healthcare advancements. The approval of a redevelopment agreement with Prairie Street Brewing Co. highlights ongoing efforts to rejuvenate commercial spaces, while AAR Corp's \$2.6 million investment in workforce training and apprenticeships at its MRO facility promises to enrich career opportunities.

Work by SiFi Networks is underway on the Rockford FiberCity project, a groundbreaking investment in state-of-the-art fiber optic infrastructure.

This innovative initiative promises fast, affordable and reliable fiber internet access for every residence and business, will attract more high-tech businesses to our community, and will employ 125 IBEW Local 196 workers for the next four years.

The permanent Hard Rock Casino, scheduled to open Labor Day weekend, is busy hiring 400 employees, adding to its current roster of 350.

In addition, the launch of the Think Big Small Business Incubator will provide essential support for local entrepreneurs. Rockford is poised for continued economic growth. These developments underscore our commitment to fostering a thriving community with lots of opportunities.



# The Workforce Connection Board Officers and Chief Elected Officials

## Board Officer



### *Board Chair*

**Michelle Cassaro**

Deputy Director of Finance and Administration  
Chicago Rockford International Airport



### *Vice-Chair*

**Todd Wells**

Director of Operations  
Bourn & Koch LLC



### *Secretary/Treasurer*

**Karen Brown**

Director, Human Resources  
Highland Community College



### *Immediate Past Chair*

**Frank Rotello, CEO**

Alpha Controls & Services  
LLC



### *Director-at-Large*

**Amy M. Ott**

President  
Boylan Catholic High  
School

## Chief Elected Officials



### *Chief Elected Officials Chair*

**Mayor Thomas P. McNamara**

City of Rockford



### *Winnebago County Chairman*

**Joseph Chiarelli**

Winnebago County Board



### *Boone County Chairman*

**Rodney Riley**

Boone County Board



### *Stephenson County Chairman*

**Scott H. Helms**

Stephenson County Board

# The Workforce Connection Board Members

**Ben Bernstein, President**

Goodwill Industries of Northern Illinois

**Scott Bloomquist, Superintendent**

Boone & Winnebago Regional Office of Education

**Todd Cagnoni, City Administrator**

City of Rockford

**Len Carter**

Freeport Hospital Network (FHN)

**Kathy Crandall**

Crandall Stats & Sensors

**Michael Dunn**

Region 1 Planning Council (R1)

**Jeff Fahrenwald**

SupplyCore

**Pamela Lopez-Fettes**

Growth Dimensions

**Suzanne K. Fischer**

OSF HealthCare St. Anthony Medical Center -  
Ambulatory and Procedural Services

**George Gaulrapp**

ComEd, An Excelon Company

**Jeremy Grayewski**

Berner Food & Beverage, LLC

**Bob Guirl**

Community Member

**Greg Harle**

UA Local 23 Plumbers & Pipefitters

**Dr. Sheila Hill**

Hill & Hill Enterprises

**Dr. Brant Hulsebus**

Hulsebus Rockford Chiropractic

**Mark Krupke**

Illinois Department of Human Services-Division of  
Rehabilitation Services

**Kris Machajewski**

YWCA Northwestern Illinois - Literacy Council

**Matt Montalbano**

RBC Wealth Management

**Paul Nolley**

Project First Rate

**Amy Nord**

Belvidere Area Chamber of Commerce

**James Pirages, Attorney at Law**

Allen Galluzzo Hevrin Leake, LLC

**Troy Primus**

AAR Corp.

**Jamie Proctor**

Americold Logistics, LLC

**Dan Ross**

Community Foundation of Northern Illinois

**Max Salazar**

Collins Aerospace

**Casey Schwebke**

Swebco Manufacturing Inc.

**Dr. Howard J. Spearman**

Rock Valley College

**Jeff Zeal**

Illinois Department of Employment Security

[The Workforce Connection Board Statement of Equity](#)

Recognizing its economic, societal and organizational benefits, we are committed leaders of workforce diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. Advocating and supporting equitable access to career and employment opportunities, we partner with employers in the region to create equity in the workplace and promote a culture of belonging where everyone is seen, heard and valued.

# The Workforce Connection

## WIOA Core Partner Organizations

As required by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), The Workforce Connection provides a fully integrated and accessible workforce development system that balances the needs of individuals and businesses to ensure our region has a skilled workforce to effectively compete in the global economy. These WIOA required core partners are an integral part of the One-Stop System providing services in our region.

These partnerships with local agencies help fulfill the needs in our tri-county area and ensure that both career seekers and employers are receiving the assistance they need to be successful. Our region's workforce system is benefited by these partnerships to ensure that each person and business in our community knows to connect with the One-Stop Career Centers at the American Job Centers.

### Goodwill Industries of Northern Illinois One-Stop Operator and Youth Program Provider

#### City of Rockford/Goodwill

- Title I: Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth
- Trade Adjustment Assistance

#### Illinois Department of Human Services - Department of Rehab Services (VocRehab)

Title IV: Rehabilitation Services

#### Rockford Housing Authority

Housing & Urban Development  
Employment and Training Activities

#### City of Rockford, Health & Human Services Department

Community Services Block Grant  
(CSBG-Boone & Winnebago Counties)

#### Illinois Department of Human Services - TANF

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

#### Rockford Public Schools

Title II: Adult Education & Literacy  
(Winnebago County)

#### Comprehensive Community Solutions

Youth Build

#### National Able Network

Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)

#### Rock Valley College

- Title II: Adult Education,
- Perkins/Post-Secondary Career & Technical Education
- Subcontractor to Goodwill for Adult, Dislocated Worker and Trade Service (Boone & Winnebago Counties)

#### Highland Community College

- Title II: Adult Education & Literacy
- Perkins/Post-Secondary Career & Technical Education  
(Stephenson County)

#### National Asian Pacific Center on Aging (NAPCA)

Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)

#### Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES)

- Title III: Employment Programs  
(Wagner-Peyser)
- Job Counseling, Training, Placement Services for Veterans
- Migrant & Seasonal Farmworker
- Trade Readjustment Assistance
- Unemployment Insurance

#### Northwest Illinois Community Action Agency

Community Services Block Grant (CSBG-Stephenson County)

#### YWCA Northwestern Illinois - Literacy Council

Title II: Adult Education & Literacy  
(Boone & Winnebago Counties)

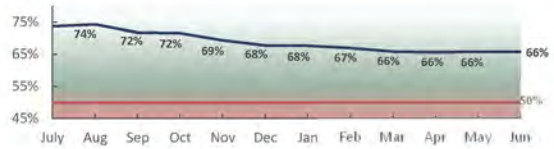




# June 2024 Finance Report Summary



**Adult & DW Minimum Training Expenditure = 66%**



**Youth Work-based Learning = 27%**

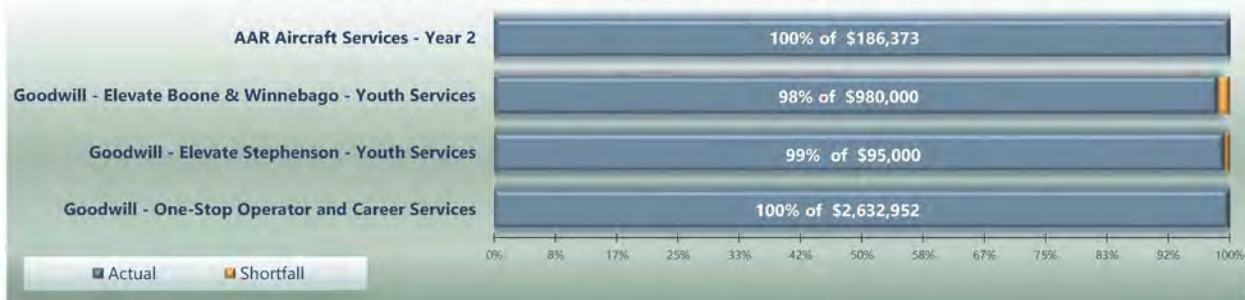


## Training Costs + Obligations



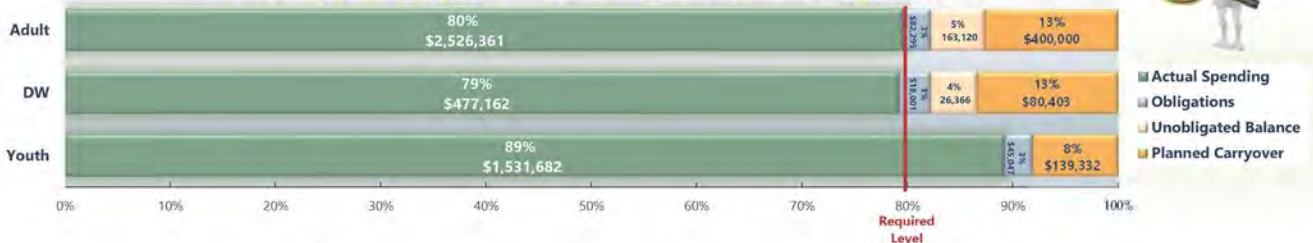
	Budget	Obs	% of Budget	Balance	
Adult Training	\$ 1,112,899	\$ 1,037,231	93%	\$ 75,668	} Combined Adult & DW Training Costs = 99%
Adult WEX/OJT	\$ 500,000	\$ 492,520	99%	\$ 7,480	
Dislocated Worker Training	\$ 169,133	\$ 156,987	93%	\$ 12,146	
Dislocated Worker WEX/OJT	\$ 50,000	\$ 35,570	71%	\$ 14,430	
Trade Grant Training	\$ 3,232,400	\$ 3,123,007	97%	\$ 109,393	
Trade WEX/OJT	\$ 7,600	\$ 14,457	100%	\$ (6,857)	
QUEST Grant Training	\$ 654,400	\$ 802,672	123%	\$ (148,272)	
Quest WEX/OJT	\$ 75,500	\$ 157,059	208%	\$ (81,559)	
State Emergency Grant Training	\$ 112,400	\$ 68,240	61%	\$ 44,160	
State Emergency WEX/OJT	\$ 26,800	\$ 25,498	95%	\$ 1,302	
Incumbent Worker Training	\$ 211,321	\$ 175,776	83%	\$ 35,545	} Youth Training Costs = 104%
Youth Training	\$ 255,142	\$ 250,418	98%	\$ 4,724	
Youth WEX/OJT	\$ 303,000	\$ 330,673	109%	\$ (27,673)	

## Subrecipient Spending - Percent of Subaward



\*Formula Funds Only

## Budget: Overall Actual Costs & Obligations

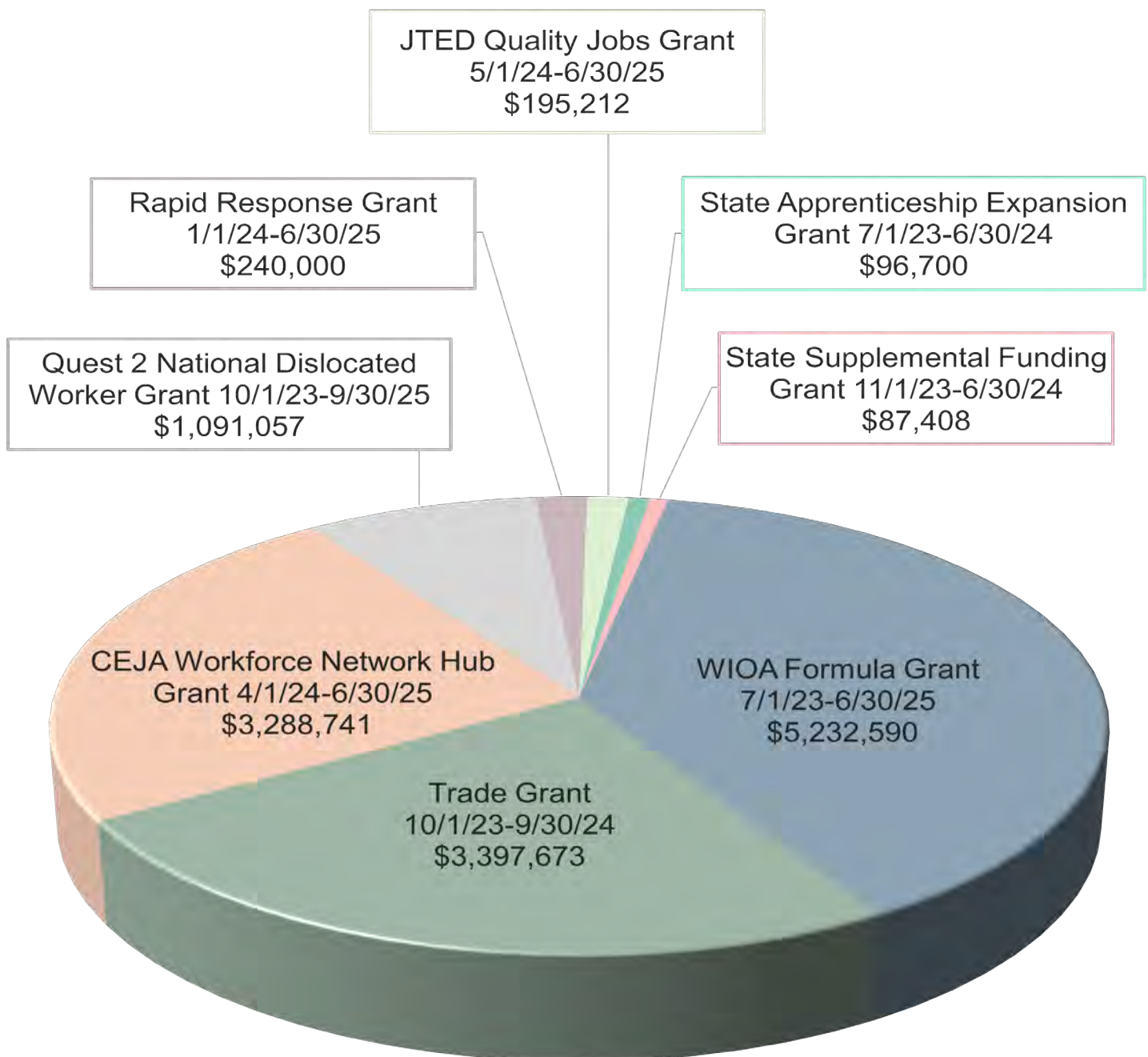


## Participant Service Levels



# Financial

## Grants Received Program Year 2023 July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024

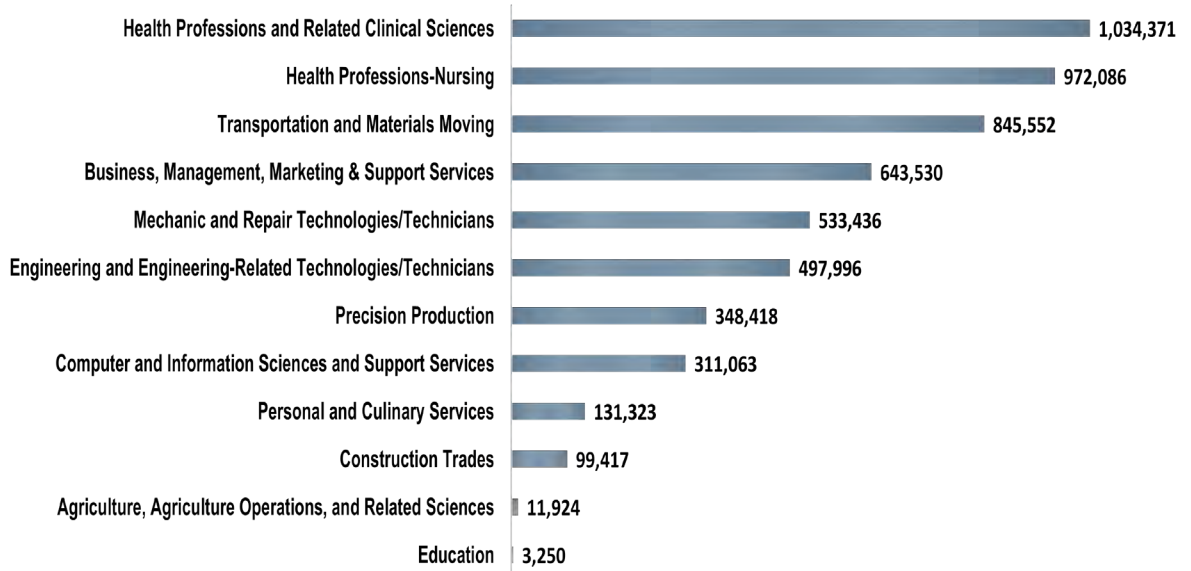


# Impact



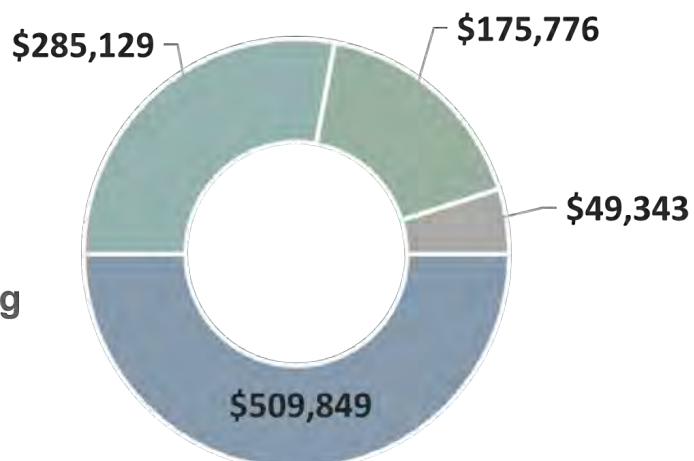
**\$5,432,366**  
Spent On Participant  
Related Training  
**54% increase over  
Program Year 2022**

## Participant Related Training by Industry Program Year 2023 July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024



**\$1,020,097**  
Spent on Employer Related Wages and Training including On-  
The-Job Training, Work Experience, Incumbent Worker Training,  
and Apprenticeships  
**5% Increase over Program Year 2022**

- Work Experience
- On The Job Training
- Incumbent Worker Training
- Apprenticeships



# Regional Impact



**524**  
Attended  
Occupational  
Skills Training

**13,887**  
Career Center Visits  
(Individuals)



**1,499**  
Hires Reported

**36,074**  
Services Provided



**434**  
Obtained a  
Credential

**555**  
Hiring Events



**245**  
Completed  
Work-Based  
Learning

**3,053**  
Interviews from  
Hiring Events

**3**  
Rapid Response  
Events

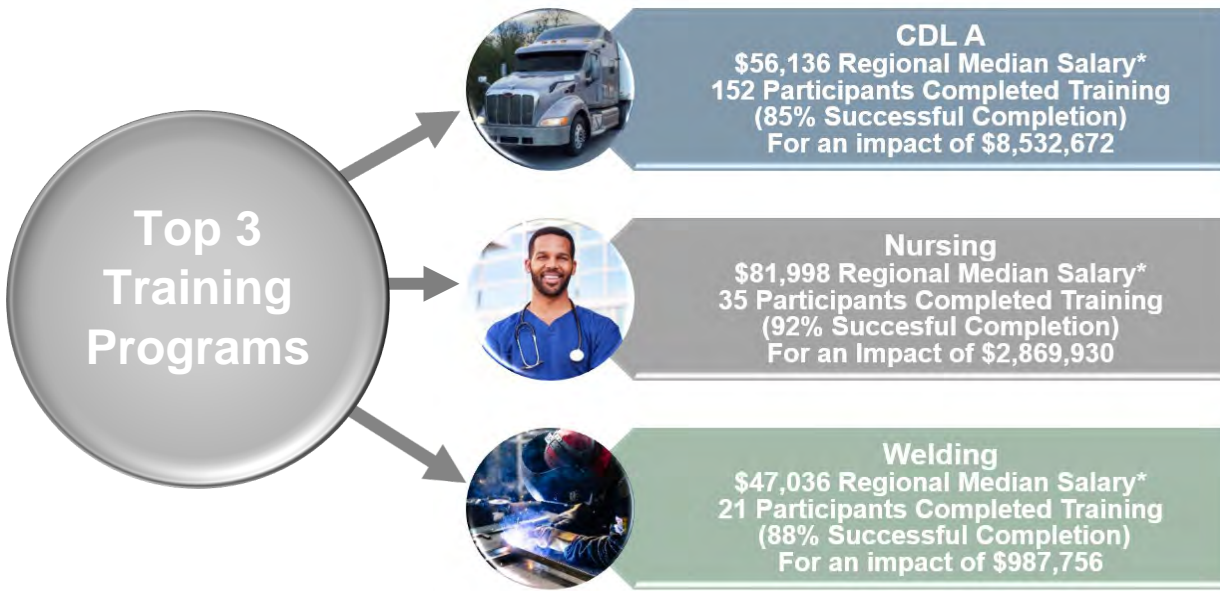


**208**  
Apprenticeships  
(Non-Registered)

**100**  
Individuals Served at  
Rapid Response  
Events

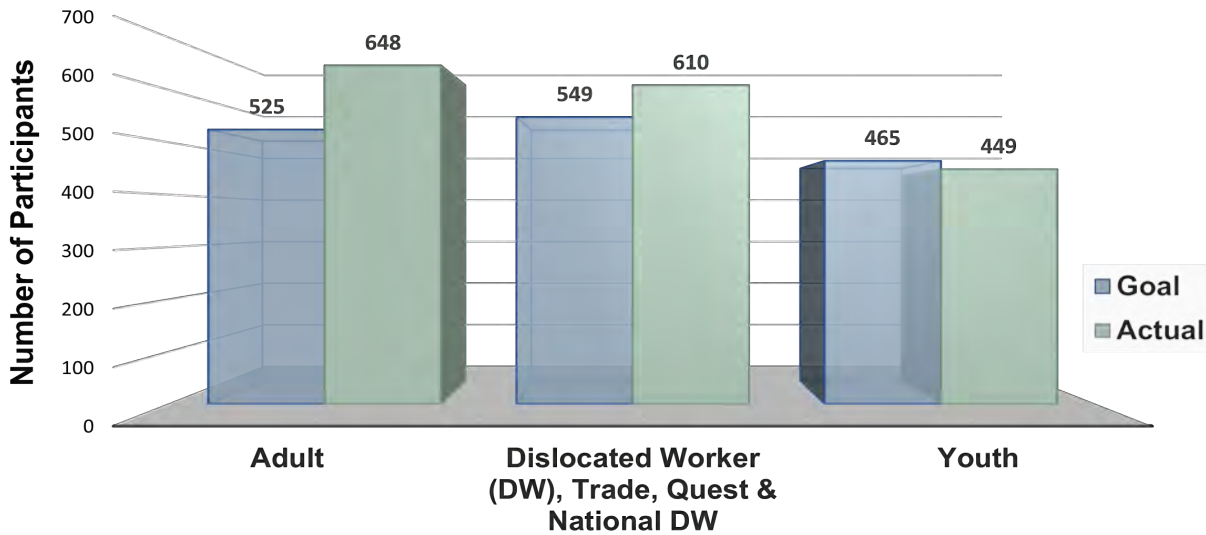


**105**  
Obtained a High  
School Diploma  
or Equivalency



\*Source for Regional Median Salary:  
Lightcast Q3 2024 Data Set | lightcast.io

## Participant Enrollment Levels



Adult	Dislocated Worker	Youth
44% Male 55.7% Female	56.4% Male 42.1% Female	51.2% Male 47.9% Female
Below 9th Grade Level at Entry 24.1% Reading 67.1% Math	Below 9th Grade Level at Entry 18% Reading 51% Math	Below 9th Grade Level at Entry 51.9% Reading 87.1% Math
27% with Legal System Involvement	10% with Legal System Involvement	10.9% with Legal System Involvement

*“There is a powerful driving force inside every human being that, once unleashed, can make any vision, dream, or desire a reality.” – Anthony Robbins*



Through The Workforce Connection’s (TWC) Elevate Youth Program, Matthew was able to gain his High School Diploma through GoodGRADS. Matthew’s Career Planner connected him with all needed resources to graduate including resume and job search assistance, which led to him finding employment. *Pictured: Matthew with his Career Planner, Anabel.*



Jose came to TWC after being a part of the large layoff from Stellantis in 2022. He worked with his Career Planner to attend an HVAC Diploma Program and graduated, but he was not stopping there! He applied for the Plumbers and Pipefitters Local 23 Apprenticeship Program, was accepted, and is on his way to becoming a Journeyman. Jose has gained experience working on the job at Helm Mechanical as an HVAC Service Technician Apprentice and is in a 5 year apprenticeship program. Jose stated, “he is grateful for this amazing program that paid 100% of his training and continues to provide support and encouragement”.



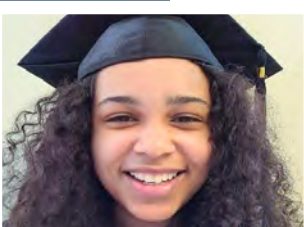
Sonya’s goal was to gain office experience, and her TWC Business Specialist helped set her up in a paid internship position with Northern Illinois Regional Affordable Community Housing (NIREACH) and she did an amazing job! Sonya helped organize and run the onsite coffee shop and the food pantry. Her supervisor stated she kept the best records. Since her successful completion of her internship, Sonya has signed up for IT classes and is achieving her goals, to obtain a certification in Web Design.



Kierson qualified for the Trade program after being dislocated from Stellantis. Despite initial apprehensions about returning to school after many years, Kierson recognized the importance of furthering his education for the sake of his family's future. Working with his TWC Career Planner, Kierson enrolled in a Welding program at a local college. After the 8-month program, he earned his Diploma in Welding and quickly obtained a position at Hennig Inc. as a Welder. Kierson is really enjoying his new job and says that he enjoys using his new skills.



With assistance from TWC, Kennedy started as a pre-apprentice and is now a first-year Pipefitter apprentice at Plumbers, Pipefitters and HVACR Local 23. Kennedy stated that “she loves being a Pipefitter Apprentice because it teaches you discipline, and she gets to learn hands-on each day”.

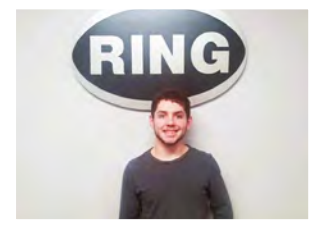


After feeling defeated in high school, Emerald explored an alternative option. Through her support admin team at school, she was connected to TWC’s Elevate Youth Program. Emerald received assistance getting her GED, receiving transportation assistance and gaining work experience. Emerald recently graduated from the GoodGRADS GED program in Belvidere and started her first job through TWC’s Elevate Work Experience Program (WEX) to gain knowledge, skills and abilities. Emerald said “Personal initiative is important to success in the program. Though everyone is very supportive, your own desire is very important.”

Suzie graduated with honors from Rock Valley College’s Respiratory Care program (AAS) and quickly received a job offer. She will begin her career at Rush University Medical Center as a license-pending Respiratory Therapist. Suzie utilized the WIOA program for tuition assistance for her education.



A senior at Harlem High School, Alex enrolled in TWC’s Elevate Youth Program through his school to participate in a paid internship in a field of interest. Alex completed his Work Experience (WEX) at Ring Container Technologies, Inc. While at Ring, he had the opportunity to get hands-on experience as a Downstream Equipment Operator. Ring Container offered him a permanent position, but as he will be going to school out of town, he will continue to work at Ring part-time when on school breaks. Alex stated he had a very positive experience with TWC’s Elevate Youth Program and would not have received the type of hands-on training he needed before going to college without this opportunity.



Halle also came to TWC’s Elevate Youth Program through Harlem High School and started a paid internship at Keller Williams/Fidelity Real Estate Group, Halle was given the opportunity to learn administrative tasks related to the real estate industry, shadow accomplished buyer’s agents to open houses and meet with investors. Halle stated “This program was an amazing experience for me. It provided opportunities that got me a step closer to achieving my future goals”. Halle did such a great job she was hired at Keller Williams Realty/Fidelity Real Estate Group!



Aloncia enrolled in TWC’s Elevate Youth Program looking to learn the skills she needed to become a private chef. She completed the Culinary Apprenticeship Program at Awaken Foundation L3C for catering coordinators, learning the ins and outs of catering. Aloncia added that “Elevate is a caring program. They push you to your full potential, and no matter what you’re going through they help you and treat you like a unique individual...”. While in the program, Aloncia received training and supportive services, and expressed that she appreciated the transportation assistance to get to class. Aloncia is now the proud business owner of Lalipops Creations LLC, working as a private chef and caterer. She also teaches others what she has learned and is developing a children’s and adult cooking class.



Bobby came to TWC and qualified to receive training due to being a previous auto industry worker. Despite having retired from Chrysler after 27 years, Bobby’s desire to continue working led him to seek out opportunities for further training and employment. Bobby explored various options, chose to pursue truck driver training and has obtained his commercial driver’s license (CDL).



Kimberly struggled to find employment, but with TWC’s help she secured a position at the local library, which has been a dream of hers. Kimberly expressed her gratitude, “Thank you to The Workforce Connection for giving me a chance and providing me with this opportunity.”



*All of us at The Workforce Connection are inspired each and every day by the dedication, perseverance and commitment of those we serve.*

Visit our home page at [TheWorkforceConnection.org](http://TheWorkforceConnection.org) to view more success stories.

# Business Services

The Workforce Connection's Business Services Team offers vast experience in workforce development. Our team connects with employers in the region to assist with attracting, retaining, and developing talent through various trainings and services.

## Services and Resources

On-The-Job Training  
Incumbent Worker Training  
Work Experience  
Apprenticeship  
Customized Training  
Jobs Board  
Job Fairs  
Hiring Events  
Assessments - Work Keys Testing Center  
Labor Market Information

Learn how The Workforce Connection can assist your business:



Call 815-395-6619 or email

[businessservices@theworkforceconnection.org](mailto:businessservices@theworkforceconnection.org)





# On-The-Job Training (OJT)

The OJT program is a “hire first program in which the employer agrees to hire, train and retain the individual upon successful completion of the training program.

The employer can be reimbursed between 50-75% of wages.

<u>Business Name</u>	<u>Number Trained</u>	<u>Type of Training</u>
Aircraft Gear Corporation	2	Saw Operator, Mechanical Engineer Intern, CNC Operator
All World Machinery Supply, Inc.	1	Repair Technician
Bourn & Koch LLC	3	Inside Sales Rep & CNC Machinist
Brynof Manufacturing, Inc.	4	Machine Operators
Crandall Stats & Sensors, Inc	1	Inventory/Customer Specialist
Doug Walker - Country Financial	2	Office Sales Assistant
Hartwig Plumbing & Heating, Inc.	2	Pipefitter Apprentices
Header Die and Tool, Inc.	3	Tool Maker
Hennig Inc.	4	Electrical Technician, Machine Operator
I. Spinello Locksmiths	1	Locksmiths
Ingersoll Machine Tools, Inc.	2	Applications Engineer, Material Handler
K-I Machine Tool and Production	2	Office / Sales Manager
Midwest Law Works, LLC	3	Real Estate Legal Assistant
Midwest Title Service, LLC	2	Escrow Closer
Plumbers and Pipefitters/Local 23	1	Pipefitter Apprentices
RAMP	1	Office Assistant
Redd Insurance Group, LLC	2	Insurance Sales
Region 1 Planning Council	1	Web Developer
Re-Nest Recovery and Supportive Services of IL, LLC	2	Peer Support Specialist
Ring Container Technologies	1	Downstream Operator
Rockford Auto Glass	6	Customer Service Rep, Manager Trainee, Window Film Installer, Shop Laborer and Fabricator, Glazier
Ro-Pal Grinding Inc.	2	Grinding Machine Set Up Operator
Seabreeze Non-Medical Transport, LLC	1	Non-Emergency Medical Transport Specialist
Sonny's Place, LLC	3	Culinary Assistants, Various Cooks
Stateline Rental Properties	1	Property Maintenance Tech, Property Management, Real Estate Transaction Coordinator
Tad More Tailoring	6	Seamstresses, Tailors, Receptionists, Marketing and Sales
Thayer Energy Solutions	2	Administrative / Warehouse Assistant
United Facilities	<u>16</u>	Shift Supervisor, Powered Industrial Truck Operators
<b>Total On-The-Job Trainings</b>	<b>77</b>	

# Incumbent Worker Training (IWT)

IWT provides funding assistance to employers to upgrade the skills of their current employees. This is a type of work-based training which provides both workers and employers with the opportunity to build and maintain a quality workforce.

<u>Business Name</u>	<u>Number Trained</u>	<u>Type of Training</u>
Abbott Plastics and Supply Co, Inc.	4	Industrial Skills
Bourn & Koch LLC	17	Supervisory/New Hire, Gear Manufacturing, Lean Simulation for Manufacturing, Inventor CAM
Ekstrom Carlson	6	ISO Certification, 5S
Forest City Gear	2	Gear School
Franklin Display Group	5	Lean Practitioner
Freeport Health Network (FHN)	63	Medical Assistant Apprenticeship, FHN ERP for Leadership, Family Medicine Practice Program, Nuclear Medicine
Header Die and Tool	38	Lean Manufacturing Overview and Simulation
Kadon Aerospace	8	Precise Inspection CMM Training, ISO 31000 for Aerospace, Internal Auditor
Quantum Design Inc	1	Geometric Dimensioning and Tolerancing
Rockford Acromatic/Aircraft Gear Corporation	14	Industrial Skills and Beginning Machining Skills
Ro-Pal Grinding Inc.	4	Studer Favorit Machine, Advanced Grinding
Superior Joining Technologies	8	Paperless Parts, TruLaser Technology, RRVTMA CNC Machinist Apprenticeship
Ultrasonic Power Corporation	1	Situational Leadership
UWHealth/Swedish American	17	Certified Clinical Medical Assistant Apprenticeships
Woodward Inc.	<u>20</u>	CNC Machinist Training
<b>Total Incumbent Worker Trainings</b>	<b>208</b>	

# Apprenticeship and Pre-Apprenticeship

Apprenticeships are an industry-driven, high-quality career pathway in which employers develop and prepare their future workforce, and individuals obtain paid work experience, earn wages, and receive classroom instruction.

All World Machinery	1	CNC Machinist Apprenticeship Program
Awaken Foundation	8	Culinary Apprentice
Freeport Health Network	1	Medical Assistant Apprenticeship
Plumbers and Pipefitters UA Local 23	1	HVACR Apprentice
Plumbers and Pipefitters UA Local 23	3	Pipefitter Apprentice
Superior Joining Technologies	1	RRVTMA CNC Machinist Apprenticeship Training
Tad More Tailoring	1	Sewing Apprentice
UWHealth/Swedish American	<u>17</u>	Phase 2 CCMA Medical Assistant Apprenticeships
<b>Total Apprenticeships-Registered &amp; Non-Registered</b>	<b>33</b>	
Goodwill Industries	14	Clean Energy Construction Pre-Apprenticeship
Plumbers and Pipefitters UA Local 23	<u>1</u>	Pipefitter Pre-Apprentice
<b>Total Pre-Apprenticeships</b>	<b>15</b>	

# Work Experience (WEX)

A Work Experience is a paid work experience for individuals who have little to no work experience or are entering a new industry. The work experience individual is hired and paid by the program and works at the employer's site.

<u>Business Name</u>	<u>Number Trained</u>	<u>Type of Training</u>
Acme Grinding & Manufacturing Inc	1	Centerless Grinding Operator
Bucciferro Family McDonalds	4	Crew Member
Burpee Museum of Natural History	4	Visitor Services, Animal Care Intern, Facilities Staff
Carlson Canine	1	Doggie Daycare Associate
Community Life Center of Rockford	9	Group Leaders
Comprehensive Community Solutions, Inc.	6	Housekeepers
Door to Door Realty	2	Administrative Assistant
Embroid This	3	Custom Apparel Production Assistant
Fidelity Real Estate Group-Keller Williams Realty	1	Real Estate Assistant
Freckle Dot	3	Store Clerk/Cook/Marketing
Freeport Art Museum	1	Museum Assistant
Goodwill (multiple offices and stores)	27	Book Assoc., E-Commerce Asst., Donation Attendant, Sales Assoc., Job Coach
IDA Public Library	5	Circulation Clerk
IMA Automation USA Inc	1	Manufacturing Intern
J's Event & Design Studio	2	Event Planner Assistant
Ken Rock Community Center	1	Program Assistant
KFACT (Keeping Families and Community Together)	1	Program Assistant Coordinator
Kids Around the World	7	Construction Assistant
Life Decisions	5	Participant Advocate, Project Coordinator
Plumbers and Pipefitters/Local 23	2	Pipefitter Apprentices
Poplar Grove Vintage Wings & Wheels Museum	1	Museum Assistant
Redd Insurance Group, LLC	1	Insurance Sales
Ring Container Technologies	1	Downstream Operator
Rock Valley College	1	Administrative Assistant
Rockford Auto Glass	1	Customer Service Rep
Rockford Chamber of Commerce	1	Administrative Assistant
Rockford Housing Authority	11	Customer Service, Community Coach, Property Mgr., Admin Clerk
Sonny's Place, LLC	10	Culinary Assistants, Various Cooks
Special Olympics Illinois	1	Sports Management Intern
Stateline Rental Properties	4	Property Maintenance Tech, Property Mgmt, Real Estate Transaction Coordinator
Stateline Solar LLC	1	Installer
Summerfield Zoo	4	Guest Services, Maintenance and Grounds Keeper
Symphony Maple Crest	1	CNA in Training
Tad More Tailoring	2	Seamstresses, Tailors, Receptionists, Marketing and Sales
Tailor Made Autoworks	3	Auto Restoration Maintenance Tech
The Workforce Connection (3 locations)	10	Career Center Assistant
Tyler's Justice Center for Children	1	MDT Coordinator
Ultrasonic Power Corporation	1	Mechanical Assembler
United Way of Northwest Illinois	2	Bookkeeper
UW Health	16	Pharmacy Technician Interns (Harlem High School)
Winnebago County Housing Authority/NiReach	8	Office Clerks, Community Liaison, Maintenance Tech Assistant, Housekeeper
<b>Total Work Experiences</b>	<b>167</b>	

# ILLINOIS WORKFORCE

## Individual Achievement Award – Alyssa Hill



Alyssa first came to The Workforce Connection’s (TWC) Elevate Youth program to earn her high school diploma; however, the timing wasn’t right for her to choose a career that suited her. She returned to the program and enrolled once again. Alyssa began with Career Readiness Classes and decided that she wanted to get into the medical industry, with the final goal of working as a pediatric nurse.

Working with her Career Planner, Alyssa was able to get a paid work experience customer service position and put the job on her resume, allowing her to apply for and get a job at a Pediatric Doctor’s office at the Front Desk. As she worked and gained experience in her field of choice, she attended school online in the evenings for her Medical Assistant program. With tuition paid by the WIOA Youth program and Alyssa’s hard work, she was able to earn her Medical Assistant Certificate. In the middle of it all, she became a new parent and still graduated early from the program. Alyssa shared that her “career planner believed in me more than I believed in myself, I’ll never forget how much this program saved me.”

Alyssa’s ability to balance her professional and personal responsibilities, including becoming a new parent while pursuing her education and career, underscores her dedication and strength. Her achievements serve as an inspiration to other youth and young adults facing similar challenges, demonstrating that with the right support and determination, they too can fulfill their dreams.

Alyssa’s journey exemplifies the power of programs like WIOA in empowering individuals to overcome barriers and pursue their career aspirations. Her determination and perseverance, combined with the support provided by the program, enabled her to achieve success.

Pictured Top Right Photo L-R:

- Jessica Story, TWC Associate Director of Workforce Development
- Anabel Morales, TWC Career Planner
- Alyssa Hill, Award Winner
- Mayor Thomas McNamara, City of Rockford Mayor/TWC Chief Elected Officials’ Chair

Pictured Bottom Left Photo:

Alyssa Hill receiving the award



# PARTNERSHIP (IWP) AWARDS

## Business Leadership Award – Absolute Fire Protection, Inc.

Absolute Fire Protection, Inc. is an industry leader in fire protection and prevention services in Northern Illinois with strong ties to the community. The company has a great need for skilled talent to install, test, repair, and perform maintenance on fire sprinkler systems – a critical role that encompasses many different skill sets. Absolute Fire Protection knew they needed to develop a talent pipeline for the talent and skill needed for these jobs, not only for the short-term but also for the long-term needs of their business and the community.



The Workforce Connection worked with Absolute Fire Protection to create the Fire Sprinkler Apprenticeship program. The partners worked together and spent time understanding Absolute’s needs and goals to ensure the program was built out effectively, and that requirements were equitable and appropriate for the roles. We worked together on the selection process to ensure we had the right candidates for the apprenticeships. With WIOA funding, Absolute was able to add additional positions beyond their initial projections, which in turn, helped the business add capacity and depth to its team.

As an Apprentice Sprinkler Fitter, apprentices learn and earn over four years with 19 classes and credentials in addition to paid training in the field. At the conclusion of the apprenticeship, individuals earn their Journeyman Sprinkler Fitter’s card. At the time of this award presentation, all of the initial candidates were still successfully on their way to becoming journeymen who will earn nationally recognized credentials and earn upwards of \$50 per hour upon completion of the program.

The Workforce Connection is proud of the partnership with Absolute Fire Protection, Inc. to expand opportunities and apprenticeships in the region.

Pictured L-R:

Mayor Thomas McNamara, City of Rockford Mayor/TWC Chief  
Elected Officials’ Chair

John Stanis, Owner of Absolute Fire Protection, Inc.

Jessica Story, TWC’s Associate Director of Workforce Development



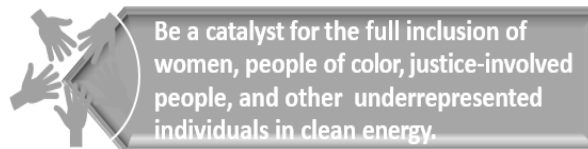
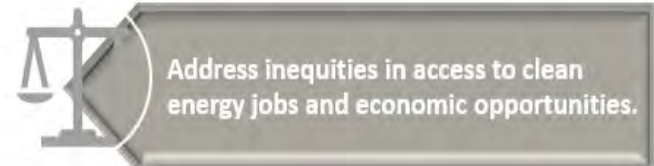
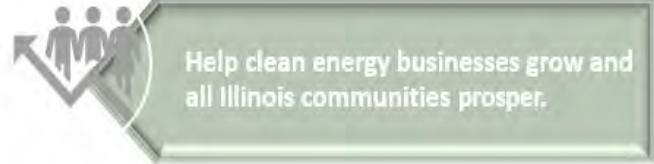


# Innovative

In June of 2023, The Workforce Connection (TWC) was awarded a Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA) - Clean Jobs Workforce Network Program “Network Hub” grant. CEJA is comprehensive energy legislation that centers equity and puts Illinois on track to achieve 100 percent renewable energy by 2050. As found on the Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity (DCEO) [CEJA webpage](#) “CEJA programs prioritize Illinoisans who live in communities that have historically faced economic barriers and environmental damage with the goal of bolstering a diverse workforce in the clean energy industry.”

As the lead applicant for the Network Hub Grant, TWC worked extensively with our regional partners to plan and apply for this grant. We would like to thank Goodwill Industries of Northern Illinois, Awaken Foundation L3C, Zion West Enterprises, Region 1 Planning Council, and Rock Valley College for their collaboration and participation to create new opportunities in the region’s workforce.

## CEJA Workforce Goals



*The Workforce Connection is proud to partner with the following collaborators on this CEJA project: Pictured left to right: Jurea Crudup of Awaken Foundation L3C, Dr. Sheila Hill of Think Big!, Nathaniel Jordan of Rock Valley College, and Courtney Geiger of Goodwill Industries of Northern Illinois.*



# Partnerships

As a result of extensive collaborative efforts between Tad More Tailoring and Alterations, The Workforce Connection, Inc. (TWC), the United States Department of Labor (USDOL), the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), and local and state elected officials, a new Industrial Sewing Apprenticeship was developed. This apprenticeship program aims to serve our region by offering hands-on training in industrial sewing techniques along with classroom instruction, fostering both technical expertise and essential job readiness skills.



Photo Credit: Kelly Lapetino

L to R: Nakeya Womack-USDOL, Debra Cremeens-Risinger -USDOL, Berenice Jaquez-TWC, Sarene Alsharif-Tad More Tailoring, Dr. Gina Caronna-TWC, Kelly Lapetino-DCEO

*"By championing immigrant integration, fostering a positive work ethic, and prioritizing inclusivity, Tad More Tailoring embodies the essence of community empowerment and cultural enrichment. Our commitment to nurturing a diverse and talented workforce while upholding the principles of sustainable fashion underscores our unwavering dedication to making a meaningful difference in the world." said Sarene Alsharif of Tad More Tailoring and Alterations*

*"I'm proud to support Tad More Tailoring in the creation of a new sewing apprenticeship program. Sewing is a critical skill that improves focus and concentration, as well as teaches the importance of patience and self-control. Participants will learn life-long skills and sustainable practices during this job training program." said City of Rockford Mayor, Thomas McNamara.*

*"As the son of a master tailor and a small business owner, I spent more than 20 years working in the family tailoring business, learning not only skills of the trade, but also the importance of providing quality customer service," said Winnebago County Board Chairman Joseph Chiarelli. "We are proud to support the Tad More Sustainability Institute Apprenticeship Program to encourage economic development in our community, promote job growth and pass on the art of tailoring."*



Above (L-R):  
 Dr. Nameer Mardini-Tad More Tailoring  
 Dr. Gina Caronna-The Workforce Connection  
 Mayor Thomas McNamara-City of Rockford  
 State Representative Dave Vella  
 Sarene Alsharif-Tad More Tailoring  
 Joseph Chiarelli-Winnebago County Chairman John Sweeney-Chair-Economic Development Committee, Quad Cities Regional Economic Development Authority (QCREDA)  
 Mazen Qassab-Tad More Tailoring

**94%**  
 of apprentices who complete a registered apprenticeship retain employment with an average salary of **\$80,000**  
 (Apprenticeship.gov)

Registered Apprenticeship is an industry-driven, high-quality career pathway where employers can develop and prepare their future workforce, and individuals can obtain paid work experience and receive progressive wage increases; classroom instruction; and a portable, nationally recognized credential. ([Apprenticeship.gov](https://www.apprenticeship.gov))

By creating this pathway for individuals who may otherwise struggle to find employment opportunities, Tad More Tailoring remains steadfast in its mission to empower and uplift

the community. A press conference held on June 5, 2024, commemorated the official signing of the apprenticeship by USDOL and Tad More Tailoring. View Tad More Tailoring's press conference video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zO0sUHfVOfY>.



Photo Credit: Ryan Davis

Meet Andrea Leon, the very first apprentice of the program who is pictured here with TWC's Business Services Specialist, Kelly Cooper.

Andrea is in her first year of the apprenticeship program at the Tad More Sustainability Institute and is on the pathway to becoming an Industrial Sewing Machine Operator.

Andrea is attending classroom studies and practices hands-on learning for the tasks required to earn her certification. Prior to coming to TWC, Andrea was operating her own business. She really loves working with animals, but she needed another career path on her way to self-sufficiency.

*Dr. Gina Caronna, TWC's Executive Director, expressed that "This apprenticeship, the first of its kind in this field, will offer many individuals a life changing opportunity"*



Photo Credit: Ryan Davis

# Regional

## Economy Overview

**379,240**

**Population (2023)**

Population decreased by 2,418 over the last 5 years and is projected to decrease by 2,471 over the next 5 years.

**169,740**

**Total Regional Employment**

Jobs decreased by 9,409 over the last 5 years but are projected to grow by 4,277 over the next 5 years.

**\$67.7K**

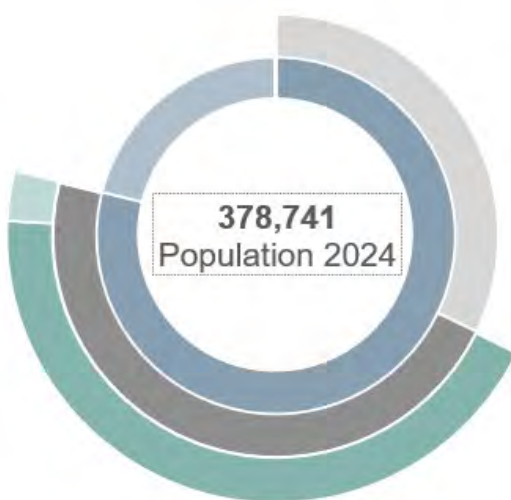
**Avg. Earnings Per Job (2023)**

Regional average earnings per job are \$15.6K below the national average earnings of \$83.3K per job.

## Takeaways

- As of 2023 the region's population declined by 0.6% since 2018, falling by 2,418. Population is expected to decrease by 0.7% between 2023 and 2028, losing 2,471.
- From 2018 to 2023, jobs declined by 5.3% in 3 Illinois Counties from 179,149 to 169,740. This change fell short of the national growth rate of 4.3% by 9.6%. As the number of jobs declined, the labor force participation rate decreased from 63.1% to 59.5% between 2018 and 2023.
- Concerning educational attainment, 15.1% of the selected regions' residents possess a Bachelor's Degree (6.1% below the national average), and 9.6% hold an Associate's Degree (0.7% above the national average).
- The top three industries in 2023 are Restaurants and Other Eating Places, Education and Hospitals (Local Government), and General Medical and Surgical Hospitals.

## March 2024 Labor Force Breakdown



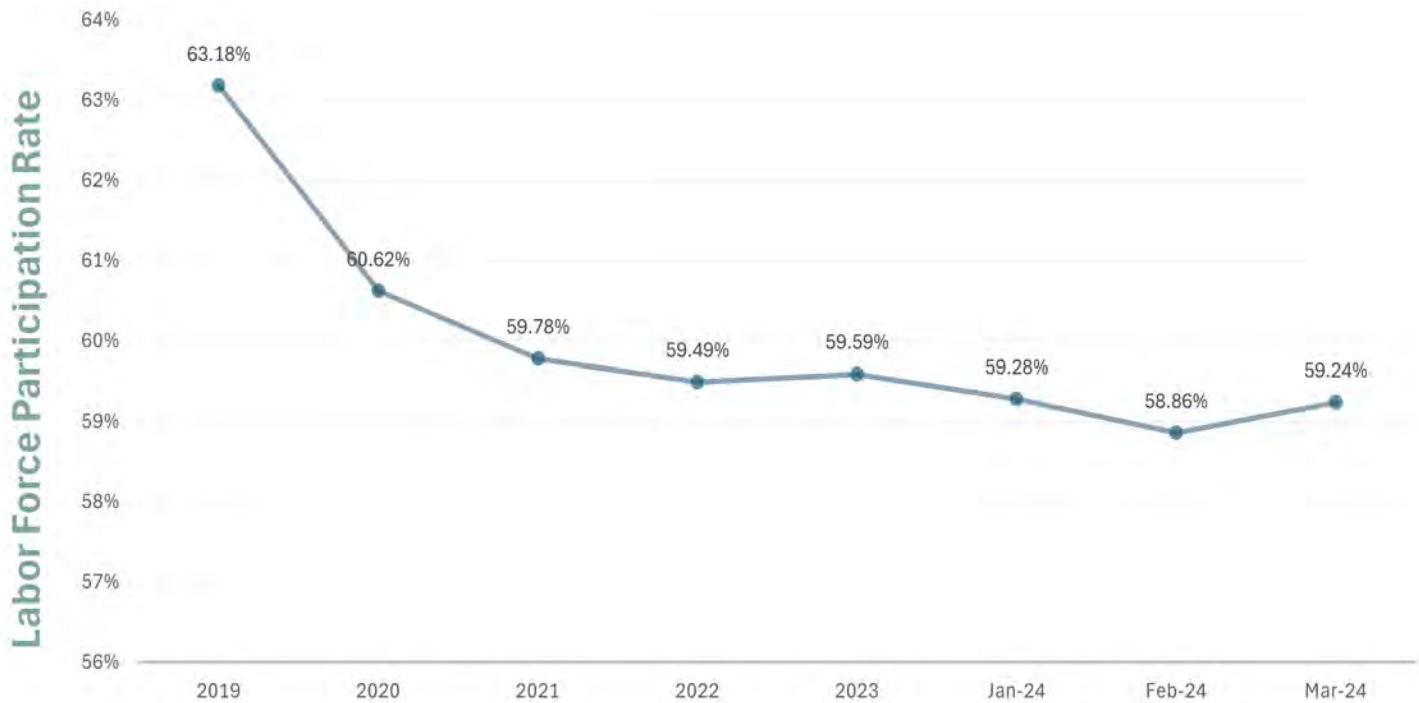
	Population
■ 16+ Civilian Non-Institutionalized Population	298,646
■ Not in Labor Force (16+)	121,734
■ Labor Force	176,912
■ Employed	165,363
■ Unemployed	11,549
■ 16+ Civilian Non-Institutionalized Population	80,095

\*Source: Lightcast Q3 2024 Data Set | lightcast.io | Economy Overview for Boone, Stephenson, and Winnebago Counties, Illinois.



# Statistics

## Labor Force Participation Rate Trends



## Population Trends

As of 2023 the region's population declined by 0.6% since 2018, falling by 2,418. Population is expected to decrease by 0.7% between 2023 and 2028, losing 2,471.

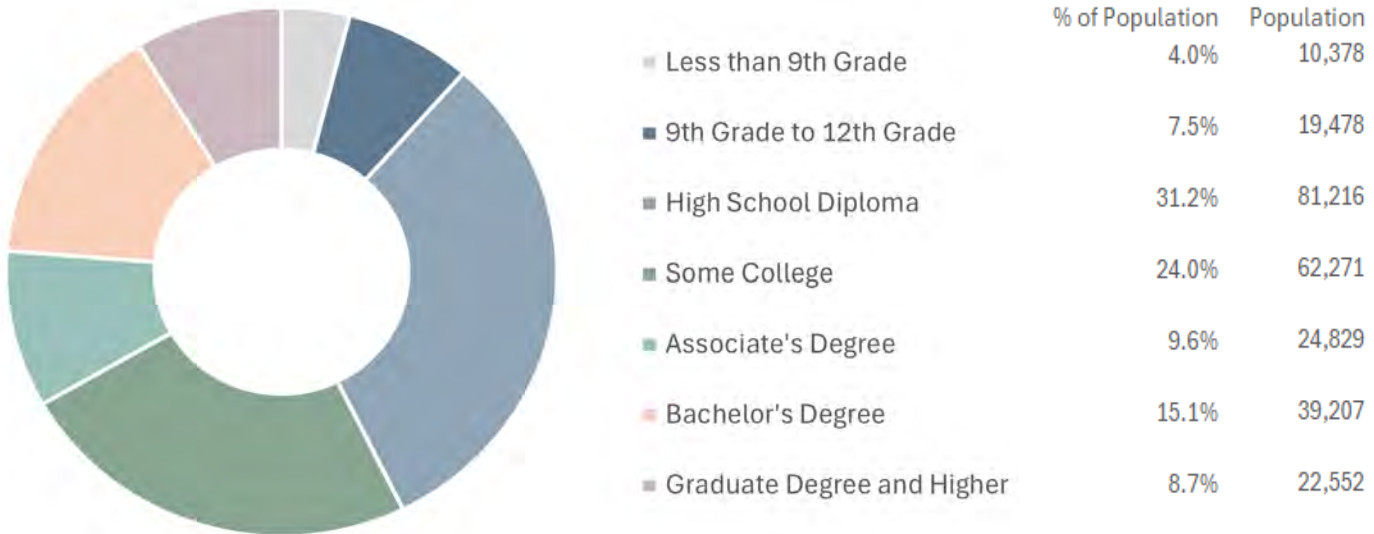


\*Source: Lightcast Q3 2024 Data Set | [lightcast.io](https://lightcast.io) | Economy Overview for Boone, Stephenson, and Winnebago Counties, Illinois.

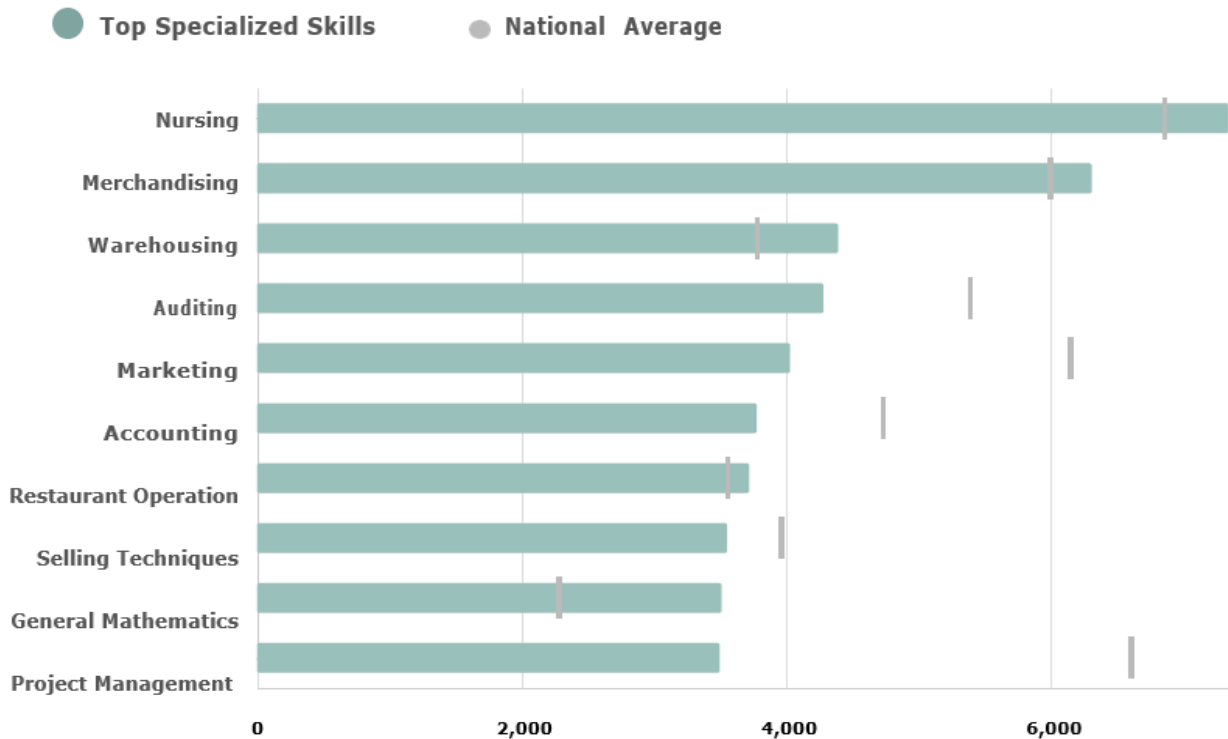
# Regional

## Educational Attainment

Concerning educational attainment, 15.1% of the selected regions' residents possess a Bachelor's Degree (6.1% below the national average), and 9.6% hold an Associate's Degree (0.7% above the national average)



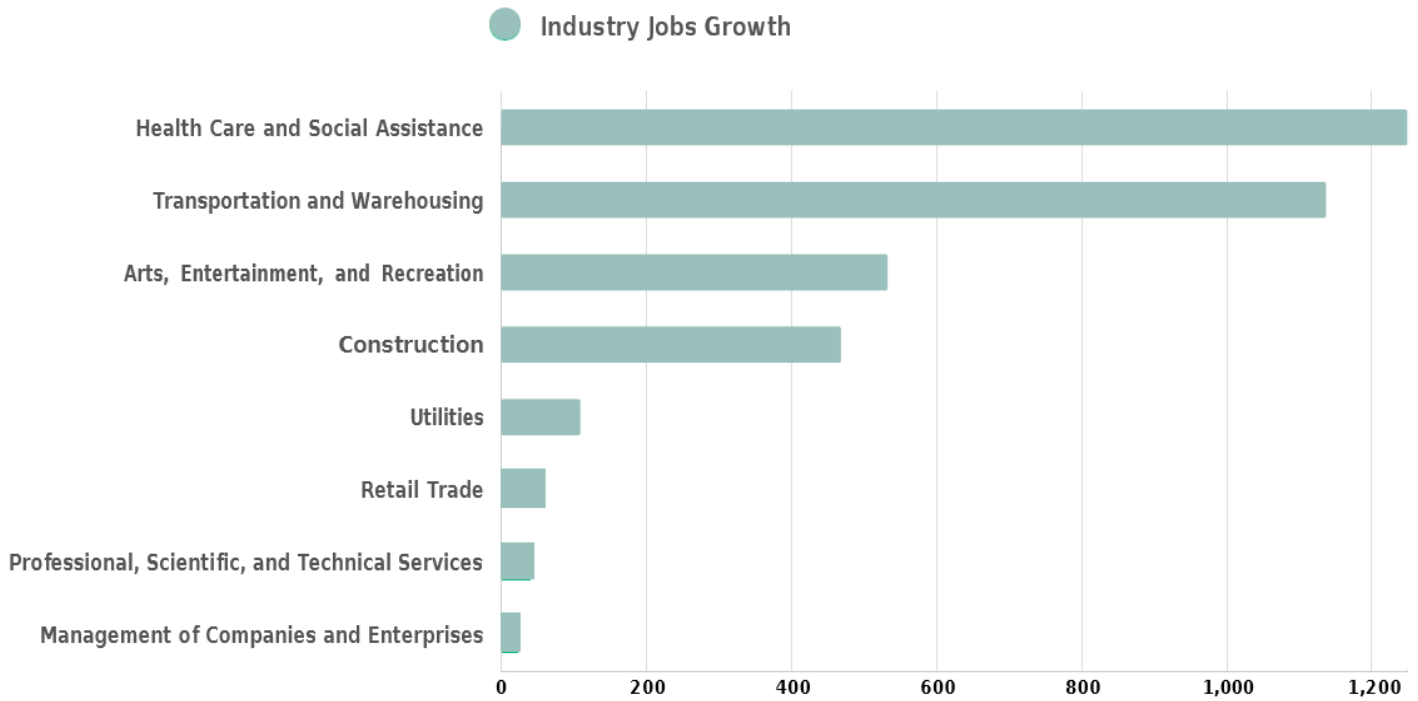
## In-Demand Skills



\*Source: Lightcast Q3 2024 Data Set | lightcast.io | Economy Overview for Boone, Stephenson, and Winnebago Counties, Illinois.

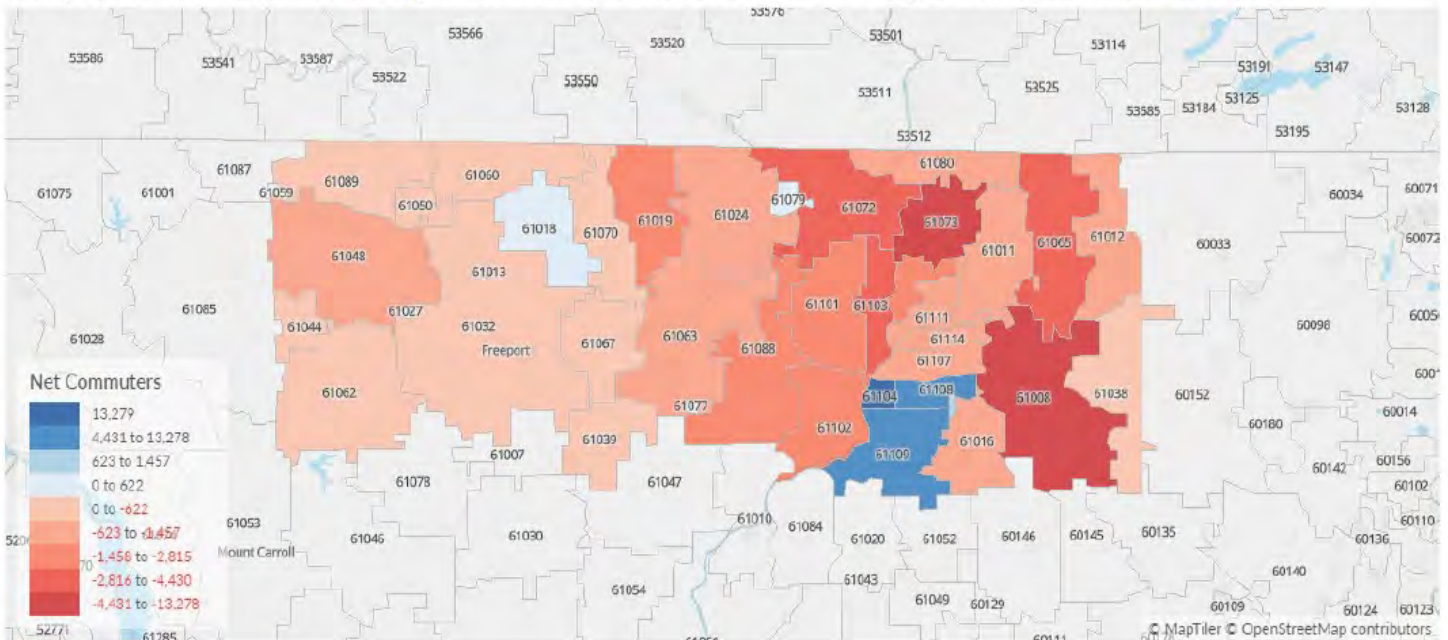
# Statistics

## Top Growing Industries



## Place of Work vs Place of Residence

Understanding where talent in the region currently works compared to where talent lives can help you optimize site decisions. For example, the #1 ranked ZIP for employment ranks #13 for resident workers. The top ZIP for resident workers is 61008.



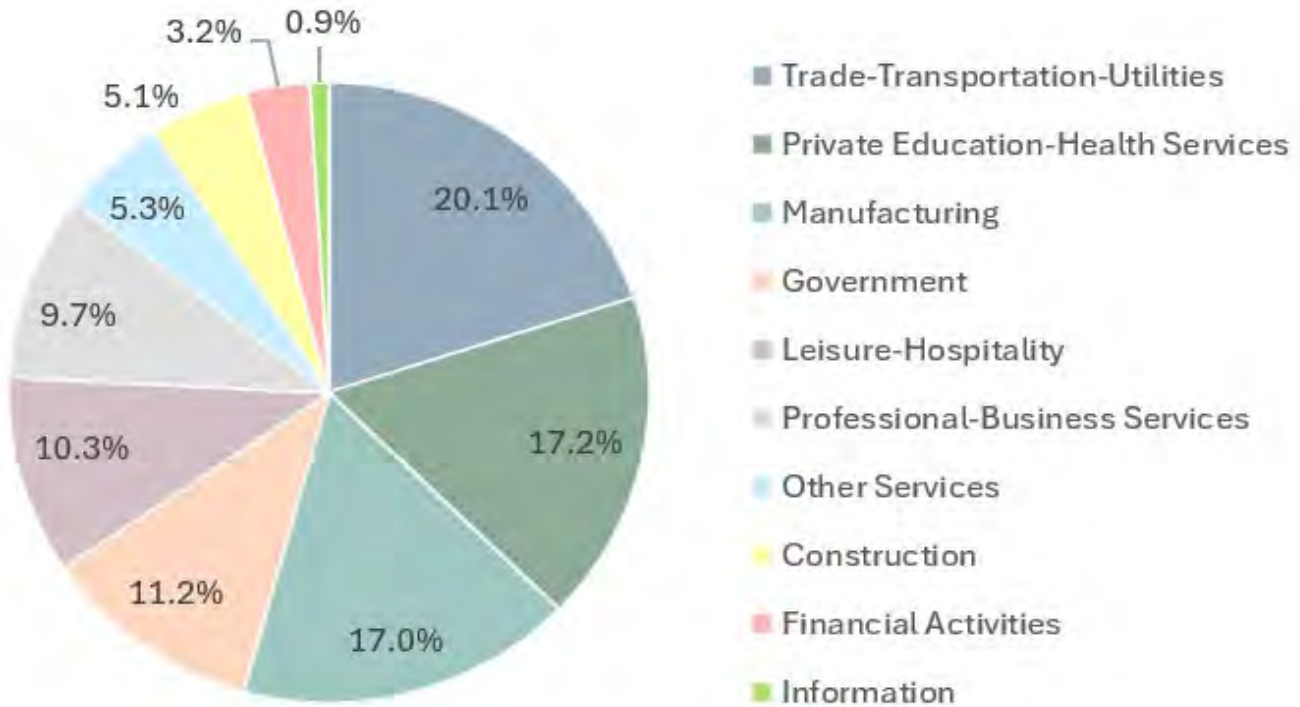
\*Source: Lightcast Q3 2024 Data Set | lightcast.io | Economy Overview for Boone, Stephenson, and Winnebago Counties, Illinois.

# Labor Force Information

## Unemployment Rates

Dashboard								
June 2024								
	Illinois		United States		Rockford MSA		LWIA 3	
<b>Current</b>	<b>6.1%</b>		<b>4.3%</b>		<b>6.7%</b>		<b>6.5%</b>	
Prior Month	4.8%	▲	3.7%	▲	5.6%	▲	5.5%	▲
Year ago	4.8%	▲	3.8%	▲	6.2%	▲	6.0%	▲
	<b>Boone</b>		<b>Stephenson</b>		<b>Winnebago</b>			
<b>Current</b>	<b>7.1%</b>		<b>5.6%</b>		<b>6.6%</b>			
Prior Month	5.6%	▲	4.8%	▲	5.6%	▲		
Year ago	6.7%	▲	4.7%	▲	6.1%	▲		
	<b>City of Belvidere</b>		<b>City of Freeport</b>		<b>City of Rockford</b>			
<b>Current</b>	<b>8.4%</b>		<b>6.9%</b>		<b>7.6%</b>			
Prior Month	6.5%	▲	5.9%	▲	6.6%	▲		
Year ago	8.0%	▲	5.8%	▲	7.2%	▲		

## Employment by Industry Share



Note: Current Month is Preliminary and Not Seasonally Adjusted

\*Source: Data provided by the Illinois Department of Employment Security, Logan Taira, Labor Market Economist, Economic Information & Analysis Division.

These reports are updated monthly and may be viewed at [www.TheWorkforceConnection.org](http://www.TheWorkforceConnection.org).

# A Message from the Executive Director

*“Over the past year, as detailed in this annual report, The Workforce Connection has experienced significant growth, anchored in the establishment and reinforcement of vital partnerships with community organizations, businesses, educational institutions, economic development entities, and the many dedicated individuals working to advance the economy in Northern Illinois. Our collective efforts have focused on closing skill gaps and expanding employment opportunities across various sectors, with a strong emphasis on leveraging data-driven strategies to address the evolving needs of the workforce.*

*We have prioritized sector-specific training programs and broadened access to career pathways, maintaining an unwavering commitment to equity and inclusivity for all residents of our communities. Apprenticeship programs have been a key component of our workforce strategy, offering hands-on, practical training in collaboration with businesses, regional trade unions, and educational providers, enabling participants to earn a living wage while obtaining internationally recognized certifications.*

*The Workforce Connection team, alongside our One Stop partners, is dedicated to delivering top-tier service in developing our region’s workforce. I extend my deepest gratitude to each member of the team for their commitment to our mission and vision, and for their role in making our region a thriving, vibrant place to live and work.”*



*Dr. Gina Caronna,*  
Executive Director



A proud partner of the American Job Center® network

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## OFFICE LOCATIONS

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**210 W. Spring Street, Freeport, IL 61032**

### THE WORKFORCE CONNECTION DISCLAIMERS

The Workforce Connection— an Illinois WorkNet Center and partner in the American Job Center network. This program is funded by The Workforce Connection, Inc., Il Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity, and the U.S. Department of Labor. The Workforce Connection is an equal opportunity employer/program. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. All voice telephone numbers on this website may be reached by persons using TTY/TDD equipment by calling TTY (800) 526-0844 or 711. Contact the Equal Opportunity Officer at 815-395-6638. This program is subject to the provisions of the “Jobs for Veteran’s Act” Public Law 107-288, which provides priority of services to veterans and spouses of certain veterans.

To view additional information related to the U.S. Department of Labor funding of this program, please visit

[www.theworkforceconnection.org/USDOLstatement](http://www.theworkforceconnection.org/USDOLstatement) .