

Duke Energy a Powerful Ally in Bridging the Skills Gap

By Laura Byrnes, APR, CPRC, Communications Manager, CareerSource CLM



What do you do when area businesses have an urgent need to find qualified talent as the job market begins to open up again yet there are gaps in workforce skills, training, and opportunities?

Absent a magic wand, organizations such as CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion work with community partners to bridge those gaps.

Two years ago, CareerSource CLM's board of directors established the *Bridging the Gap Award* to recognize partnerships between area businesses and our education partners that expand and improve career educational programs needed by regional businesses.

The Duke Energy Foundation and the Ocala Metro Chamber and Economic Partnership (CEP), were honored at this year's State of the Workforce Conference *Recover, Redesign, Rework* for its strong commitment to supporting the region's talent supply needs by fostering collaboration and communication between business and education.

The conference brought together businesses, community and public partners, education leaders, and HR professionals, to identify ways the region's businesses may begin to recover

from the impacts of the pandemic on the workforce, redesign how the workplace may function moving forward, and rework ways to build the talent pipeline to meet in-demand and emerging needs.

Among its many "K to Career" educational and workforce development initiatives, Duke was honored for its collaboration with CareerSource CLM and the Citrus County School District to improve career awareness for students, parents, and businesses.

Toward that end, Duke provided CareerSource CLM with two grants to produce career awareness-talent pipeline videos that help power awareness of public-school career and technical education programs as well as key CTE programs offered by the College of Central Florida.

All told, the project resulted in videos promoting 36 career academies and programs throughout the region, including 11 highlighting CTE programs offered by the Citrus County School District.

Debra Stanley, Citrus County schools' CTE coordinator, noted that "it's never too early to choose a profession" and that the videos can help students make "smart career choices."



Stanley, who also serves on CSCLM's board of directors, added that the CTE programs are designed to "educate, guide and prepare students to enter the workforce as qualified candidates with superior confidence."

Among the CCSD videos are those featuring programs for Agriscience and Agrotechnology, Biomedical Technology, Digital Media Technology, Digital Information Technology, Digital Design, Drafting, and Website Technologies. You can check them out, as well as videos for career programs in Levy and Marion counties and those offered by CF, by visiting <https://careersourceclm.com/talent-pipeline/career-awareness-talent-pipeline-videos/>



Dorothy Pernu receiving the Bridging the gap award.

Dorothy Pernu, Duke's manager of government and community relations, said Duke Energy is "committed to ensuring that our organization has a workforce development strategy that enables the company to build a skilled, qualified, and very talented diverse pipeline."

"We couldn't accomplish that without CareerSource CLM, our school boards throughout Citrus, Levy, and Marion counties as well as our state College of Central Florida and so many others," Pernu said in accepting the award on behalf of Duke. Duke was recognized for myriad other K to Career initiatives throughout the region. In Citrus County those include

Engineering and Energy Learning Experience Success Camps for fifth and eighth graders, the First Library program that supplies books for PreK and Kindergarten students for in-school read ins, and Foundation for Success classroom mini-grants in energy, engineering, and environmental studies. Duke also helped ensure students who needed it had internet connectivity to participate in virtual classrooms as well as provided coolers for school lunch neighborhood delivery for students in need.

Additionally, Duke takes part in the annual Youth Energy Academy in conjunction with SECO, Ocala Electric Utility, and others, and supports the Digital Media Technology summer program at CF which is open to students from Citrus and Marion counties.

There's more, but I think it is clear that Duke is indeed a powerful ally when it comes to expanding and improving career educational programs that enhance the region's talent pipeline.

Laura Byrnes, APR, CPRC, communications manager at CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion, is Accredited in Public Relations, a Certified Public Relations Counselor and a Florida Certified Workforce Professional. She would love to hear from you and learn what kind of information you'd like to see each month. Please contact her at (352) 291-9559, (800) 434-5627, ext. 1234 or lbyrnes@careersourceclm.com.

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