



TOM SHERLIN | THE DAILY TIMES

MARGARET MULLER (FROM LEFT), Blount County Adult Education Program's technology coordinator; Carol Ergenbright, BCAEP coordinator and supervisor; Bob Myers, ALCOA Tennessee Operations' human resources manager; Bill Eanes, Blount Partnership's director of economic and work force development; Ken McMillen, ALCOA Tennessee Operations' location manager; and Dave Bennett, Cherokee Millwright's CEO, talk about an ALCOA Foundation grant that will provide at least 50 young adults with a paid manufacturing internship.

'Game changer'

ALCOA Foundation launches internship program

BY MATTHEW STEWART
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Local businesses and nonprofits have partnered together to potentially change the lives of at least 50 young Blount County residents.

ALCOA Foundation announced Monday that it will fund a \$1.25 million internship program for 500 students in eight counties over the next two years. The program is a communitywide initiative involving several manufacturing companies and will be managed by the Institute of International Education. Its goal is to provide unemployed youth with the experience to start a successful career in manufacturing.

Blount County is one of 10 locations to receive funding. The Blount Partnership is administering the grant, in conjunction with the Blount County Adult Education Program.

Administrators plan to serve at least 50 adults between 18 and 24 years old, starting in 2014, said Bill Eanes, Blount Partnership's director of economic and work force development. Participants will receive 100 hours worth of soft-skills training in a class-

TO GET INVOLVED

Adults who are interested in participating in the ALCOA Foundation program should contact Blount County Adult Education at 865-982-8998. Eligibility criteria is expected to be available next month.

Businesses who are interested in hosting program participants should contact Bill Eanes, Blount Partnership's director of economic and work force development. He can be reached at 865-983-7715 or beanes@blountpartnership.com.

room setting and a 100-hour paid internship on site.

The program is a "game changer," Eanes said. "We need a skilled, capable work force."

Eanes said employers are looking for dependable, punctual employees who can communicate effectively, problem solve and work well with others.

ALCOA Tennessee Operations and Cherokee Millwright will participate in the program, he said. Blount Part-

nership will seek out other business partners in the coming weeks.

ALCOA sees gaps in employee basic skills, such as reading and following directions, tape measuring and working through problems, said human resources manager Bob Myers.

The company will focus on three areas: industrial safety, lean manufacturing and mobile equipment, Myers said.

Cherokee Millwright needs welders, pipefitters and sheet metal mechanics, said Dave Bennett, Cherokee Millwright's CEO.

The Blount County Adult Education Program will work to address the program's soft-skills component.

"We're excited to be a part of it," said Carol Ergenbright, BCAEP coordinator and supervisor. "We serve 600 people per year, and 60 percent are looking for a job. Many students are interested in manufacturing, so it's an ideal partnership for us."

Educators are assessing ways to incorporate more skills into the curriculum, she said. They might have to create another class to accommodate student needs.