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Here's how West Valley built a talented workforce to fuel its economy

Albert Einstein once said, “Imagination is everything. It is the preview of life’s coming attractions.” One thing the West Valley does not lack is imagination for what’s to come. As one of the fastest-growing regions in Arizona and the country, West Valley economic leaders and planners have been anticipating and preparing for the expansion of several targeted industries. Among some of the fastest growing of these sectors are healthcare, advanced manufacturing and technology. Naturally, as these industries continue to expand in the West Valley, so will the demand for skilled labor and a talented workforce in these fields.

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Can the West Valley provide the talent needed to pace targeted-industry growth in these areas? Stakeholders, city leaders and statistics certainly project yes!

According to a report conducted by [WESTMARC](#), 36% of healthcare workers, 34% of manufacturing employees and 23% of professional, scientific and technical services professionals reside in the West Valley.

“When you look at Maricopa County and break the region into roughly one-third, we clearly have our share of the workforce — holding our own in the market,” says Sintra Hoffman, president and CEO of WESTMARC. The areas that we’re still trying to grow — about the 33% mark — we’re doing so with our strong partnerships with education communities, connecting them to the business community.”

Hoffman also explains that WESTMARC is in the last year of the five-year Workforce Pipeline Plan. As we wrap up the work we've done, we're getting ready to launch Workforce Pipeline II," she says. "We've been successful, but because of the impacts of the pandemic on the workforce, we need to continue to work harder to ensure continuation of our workforce. With that said, we have all the right ingredients to continue success, including hiring Kevin Duncum as our regional workforce development director."

Right now, upwards of 1.8 million people reside in the West Valley, with projections showing continued growth.

"Healthcare and healthcare investment is driven by rooftops and the West Valley certainly has that with 1.8 million people," Hoffman says. "What we're seeing now is more specific and targeted healthcare specialty investments."

Interested companies and organizations are well aware of the population boom.



at twice the national rate over the next several years — and kids represent a big part of this growth."

According to Lehmuth, the number of children is estimated to grow 25% — from 400,000 today to 500,000 in 2030.

To accommodate the influx of pediatric needs in the West Valley, Phoenix Children's Hospital expansion includes Phoenix Children's Hospital-Arrowhead Campus, Southwest Freestanding Emergency Department Campus and Phoenix Children's Sports Medicine Clinic in Avondale.

"From an economic perspective, our West Valley expansion is bringing more than 465 jobs and an investment of more than \$200 million to the West Valley," Lehmuth says.

"We spent several years determining how best to address the rising demand for healthcare services," he continues. "The children who live in this community today, and those who are moving to the West Valley in droves, need and deserve access to world-class pediatric medical care, right in their own backyard."

Similar to Children's Phoenix Hospital, Banner Health recognized growth opportunities within the West Valley and is investing in a new four-story, 330,000-square-foot hospital set to open in 2024 on the northwest corner of Verrado Way and the I-10 freeway.

Additional healthcare organizations specializing in surgery and emergency care, rehabilitative services and behavioral and mental health options such as IMS, AKOS, Clear Sky and Abrazo have facilities — or planned locations — in the West Valley.

As an example of specialization, Hoffman notes, "Abrazo has new equipment that only a handful of hospitals have in the nation, including the Loop-X robot to assist in spine surgery operating rooms, enabling more precise surgery."

As for the talent needed to feed and sustain increased healthcare activity, there are several educational pathways and business programs and partnerships to produce healthcare professionals.

"We are working diligently to train the next generation of nursing talent," Lehmuth says. "In 2018, Phoenix Children's and Arizona State University formed a joint operating commission (JOC) to enhance educational opportunities and research efforts and address a looming nursing shortage — especially in specialty care."

In 2019, Lehmuth notes, JOC launched two new programs: The Dedicated Education Unit (DEU), as well as The Acute Care Pediatric Nurse Practitioner Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) and Certificate Program Curriculum.

The West Valley houses several universities and educational institutions offering nursing and healthcare-focussed degree programs including Grand Canyon University (GCU), Midwestern University, Webster University, Carrington College and more.

Jeanine Jerkovic, economic development director for City of Surprise, says that as part of its offerings, Ottawa University has paid close attention to the West Valley's need for healthcare workers, and in response, "The school looks to address the need for more qualified

nurses with its RN to BSN program.”

Advanced manufacturing continues to make its mark

Once again, fingers can point back to the West Valley’s strategic planning of infrastructure and transportation as encouraging a healthy advanced manufacturing sector. A collaborative report published by WESTMARC and CBRE reflects that the West Valley is home to 984 businesses and 43,890 employees in the manufacturing market.

Loops 202 and 303, have helped foster healthy activity in both advanced manufacturing and technology, with the former providing the added benefit of company participation in the Greater Maricopa Foreign Trade Zone #277. “Many companies along Loop 303 (and elsewhere) participate in the GMFTZ,” according to WESTMARC.

Many nationally recognized fulfillment centers and manufacturing operations have been attracted to the West Valley, including Amazon, Carvana, Knight-Swift Transportation, Pepsi/Gatorade, PetSmart, Target, Tyson Foods, Nestlé, KORE Power, Williams Sonoma and Microsoft.

Of course, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) has made waves with its arrival to the region, bringing thousands of jobs with it.

“We are working with all our education partners to ensure that the right workforce is facilitated for the success of TSMC,” Hoffman says.

Adds Laura Franco French, director of state government relations for TSMC, “TSMC is fortunate to have found the space we needed in the West Valley. We are close to the I-17 and the 303 which connect easily to other freeway systems. We are in an area that is now seeing a lot of growth in terms of housing, retail, restaurants and other amenities. It’s an exciting time to be in the West Valley. The local chambers of commerce have done a great job of ensuring businesses have what they need to thrive.”

French goes on to say that in addition to an advantageous transportation system, the West Valley's workforce pipeline provided another valuable draw to the region. "We are in close proximity to several community colleges and universities and the top rated Deer Valley Unified School District."

TSMC has also done its part — along with other semiconductor manufacturing companies such as Intel and NXP — to strengthen the workforce pipeline by partnering with educational partners like Estrella Mountain Community College (EMCC), Mesa Community College (MCC) and Chandler Gilbert Community Colleges.

"EMCC specifically, has been working with TSMC for the past two-plus years," says Paula Livingston, interim vice president of academic affairs, dean of instruction and workforce development, business adjunct faculty of EMCC. "TSMC, Intel and the other companies sat down with the Maricopa Community Colleges to develop the Semiconductor Quick Start Training Program."

The program Livingston references is a two-week, 40-hour program offered in the fall and spring semesters that prepares students with the skills and knowledge they need to fulfill entry-level positions within the semiconductor industry.

"TSMC's partnerships with local community colleges and universities on educational programs focused on training the future talent for the semiconductor industry is imperative for the ramp up of TSMC Arizona," French says. "We are confident that the strength and diversity of the engineering talent pipeline from across Arizona will provide us with outstanding recruits."

Other businesses are doing their part too, to help educate and foster new generations of skilled West Valley workers. IRIS USA, in Surprise for example, has instituted a specialized robotics program. "The way they have transitioned robotics and AI into their operations has tied in — and addressed — some of the challenges and needs we have in the workforce," Hoffman says.

Technology trends

Technology has steadily gained traction in the West Valley, especially with the formation of logistic hubs like the Phoenix Goodyear Airport and Airpark Logistics Center. While this area houses several advanced manufacturing companies such as Amazon, UPS and FedEx, it also has an expanding pocket of technology-based and data center businesses.

More recently, powerhouses such as KORE Power, Salt River Project (SRP) and Nikola Corp have plans to establish footings along State Route 85.

Support for the West Valley's increasing technology-workforce pipeline needs is being met through several higher education degree pathways in addition to career and technical training programs.

"[The Semiconductor Quick Start Training Program] directly aligns with the West Valley's targeted industry growth in advanced manufacturing and technology," Livingston says, adding, "This course also provides students with college credits that they can apply to either a certificate of completion or an associate degree."

ASU's President, Dr. Michael Crow points to The School of Technology, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, in the W. P. Carey School of Business, which "provides an academic home for technology, innovation and entrepreneurship to expand access to entrepreneurial-based programs including unique continuing and executive education programs."

WEST-MEC's Northeast and Central Campuses provide coding courses, and the Northwest and Southwest Campuses offer IT security courses.

In regard to the workforce pipeline, WEST-MEC Superintendent Dr. Scott D. Spurgeon says, "West-MEC is a key player in the West Valley's rapidly growing industry ecosystem. On a 30,000-foot level, West-MEC meets with high-level business and education partners through our Superintendent Institutional Advisory Commission.

"On the ground level, our program advisory councils help ensure our programs continue to meet industry standards by receiving feedback from business stakeholders who share expert knowledge of their respective career pathways, skilled tasks and credential requirements," he adds.

Beyond educational entities and businesses addressing the workforce needs of a rapidly growing West Valley, Hoffman explains that an influx of remote workers from other states has helped bolster several industries.

“Since the pandemic, every region has grown its remote workforce in Arizona,” she says, “and the West Valley has gained its share of technology-focused remote workers.”

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