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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OPPORTUNITY YOUTH LET THEIR CAREERS TAKE FLIGHT THROUGH THE J.E.T. PROGRAM

The J.E.T. (Jobs, Education, and Training) program is targeted towards young individuals between the ages of 16-24

Morganton, N.C. – Work in Burke, a collaborative initiative between The Industrial Commons and Burke Development, Inc., launched a brand new program in Fall of 2023 called J.E.T. (Jobs, Education, and Training). The J.E.T. Program was designed to help address the needs of Opportunity Youth, defined as young people ages 16-24 not enrolled in school or employed, in Burke County through employment placement assistance, mentorship, and professional development opportunities. As of 2019, 22% of 16-24 year olds in Burke County qualified as Opportunity Youth. This demographic often faces barriers to maintaining employment or seeking postsecondary education and becomes disengaged with their community.

Jessey Belton (age 18), a former attendee of the Industrial Sewing Boot Camp at the Industrial Commons, and now a proud alumni of the J.E.T. (Jobs, Education, & Training) program, was one of the first participants to complete this pilot program. Through J.E.T., Jessey was able to receive assistance with job placement, professional development training, and tools of the trade. Jessey's journey highlights the transformative impact of workforce development initiatives on individuals seeking to enhance their skills and secure meaningful employment opportunities.

Reflecting on the experience, Jessey remarked, "I was first enrolled in the industrial sewing boot camp, taught by the wonderful Ms. Ashley Dula, which focused on introducing sewing fundamentals and refining the students' skill." Designed to meet the evolving needs of the textile industry, the Industrial Sewing Program offers comprehensive training in industrial sewing techniques, equipping participants with the knowledge and proficiency necessary to excel in this specialized field. Through a combination of hands-on instruction and classroom learning, students gain practical experience in sewing operations, preparing them for employment opportunities in various sectors of the textile industry.

Catherine Armstrong, the Carolina Textile District Director, underscores the significance of this collaborative initiative, stating, "The Carolina Textile District Industrial Sewing Program, in collaboration with Western Piedmont Community College, is a wonderful opportunity for community members to gain a new life-long skill in only 2.5 weeks." By leveraging the expertise and resources of both organizations, the program aims to empower individuals with the tools and training needed to succeed in today's competitive job market.

Before completing the Industrial Sewing Program, Jessey's focus turned to figuring out her next steps, "with the exceptional help of Deisy Zavala Vazquez (my J.E.T. mentor) I found employment at Chaddock. Through these programs offered by Work in Burke and The Industrial Commons, I found opportunities that enabled me to take a confident step forward and continue progressing towards my goal of gaining purposeful employment in a trade I enjoyed. I encourage anyone wishing to broaden their skill sets or seeking employment to enroll in these programs and explore what they have to offer."

The J.E.T. program, facilitated by Work in Burke and The Industrial Commons, serves as a crucial resource for individuals like Jessey, providing a structured pathway towards sustainable employment by offering comprehensive training, mentorship, and job placement assistance.

Chaddock Team Member, Louie Weatherman expressed gratitude towards the J.E.T. program for introducing Jessey to the team, recognizing her talent as a valuable asset. He affirms, "The J.E.T. program gifted us a talent and our plans are to provide all the training necessary to provide Jessey a great career path." Weatherman highlighted the significant strides Jessey has made and continues to make within her role. Acknowledging the intricate nature of developing sewing skills, Weatherman emphasized the importance of attitude and personality in fostering a successful career path. He adds, "Developing sewing skills takes time and patience...the skills of attitude and personality are made throughout lifetimes which Jessey has demonstrated she has learned well."

Reflecting on the significance of the J.E.T. program, Chaddock's Human Resources Director, Susan Hicks, remarked "The J.E.T. program is a great follow-up to OPT-IN! An opportunity for individuals to learn and develop a career." Opportunity Internship (OPT-IN) is an 8-week paid summer internship offered to graduating high school seniors. It combines mentorship, professional development, and work experience to allow the participants to explore career and educational opportunities in Burke County. More information about the program can be found at www.workinburke.com/optin. Hicks expresses her confidence in Belton's ability to uphold Chaddock's standards of excellence. She adds, "We have gained quite an asset!"

Work in Burke is fortunate to have multiple community partnerships. The local employers that sign up for the program are a huge part of the success of the program as well as the partnerships through Burke Development Inc., Western Piedmont Community College, and NC Works. Jessey's successful completion of the program not only emphasizes her personal commitment to professional growth but also highlights the collaborative efforts of local organizations in addressing workforce development needs within the community.

"We are immensely proud of Jessey's accomplishments and dedication throughout her journey in the J.E.T. program," said Sarah Crisp, Work in Burke Program Director." Her story exemplifies the positive outcomes that result from investing in workforce development initiatives. Jessey's experience serves as an inspiration to others, showcasing the transformative power of access to skilled training and employment opportunities."

As Jessey embarks on the next phase of her career journey, she stands as a testament to the effectiveness of programs like J.E.T. in empowering individuals to achieve their professional aspirations and contribute meaningfully to the workforce.

For more information about the J.E.T. Program, please visit the following link:

<https://www.workinburke.com/jet>



Caption: J.E.T. participant Jessey Belton in her role as a sewer at Chaddock Furniture.

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About The Industrial Commons:

The Industrial Commons is a 501(c)(3) founded in 2015. Their mission is to rebuild a diverse working class based on locally rooted wealth. They do this by founding and scaling employee owned social enterprises, creating industry networks and delivering a suite of workforce

development and youth engagement programs. To learn more about TIC, visit www.theindustrialcommons.org or sign up for their next community open house at www.theindustrialcommons.org/connect.

About Work in Burke:

A shared project of [Burke Development, Inc.](#) & [The Industrial Commons](#), their mission is to increase post-secondary credential attainment & make local workforce connections by providing mentorship and education about skilled pathways to gainful employment for students and individuals in Burke County in collaboration with [Burke County Public Schools](#) & [Western Piedmont Community College](#).

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