



August 11 2004

Speaker: CareerTech important for future workforce

**By Van Mitchell
Stillwater NewsPress**

Like many other states, Oklahoma is facing a shortage of qualified workers to fill jobs as baby boomers begin to retire in droves.

That problem will only get worse, said Joyce Gioia, a national speaker on labor issues.

She spoke Tuesday at Meridian Technology Center where she presented a program titled "Capitalizing on the Impending Crisis."

Gioia is a contributor to The Christian Science Monitor, Entrepreneur Magazine, Business Week, The Wall Street Journal and National Public Radio.

Gioia said industries facing employee shortages range from hospitality to health care to automotive to construction.

"They are having a heck of a time finding people," she said. "We're in for some challenging times."

Gioia said some Oklahoma communities are also facing problems with unemployment.

She said June figures show Enid's unemployment rate rose from 2.4 percent to 2.6 percent; Lawton's rate rose from 3.4 to 3.6 percent; Oklahoma City, 3.9 to 4.9 percent; and Tulsa, 4.7 to 4.9 percent.

Stillwater's unemployment rate has remained steady at 2.8 percent.

Gioia said for years employers could count on the loyalty and work ethic of the baby boomer generation.

She said some of today's generation don't share that same philosophy and employers find it more difficult to retain employees.

Gioia said employers and educators need to do a better job in getting the new generation to step up to the leadership plate.

"Many young people don't want to lead," she said. "We have a real educational job with these young people on the value they can bring to the table."

Gioia said the Bush administration has identified high-growth economic sectors that will face employee shortages, including automotive, advanced manufacturing,

biotechnology, construction, energy, geospatial, health care, hospitality, information technology, retail and transportation.

Gioia said Oklahoma's education system can play a key role in helping train new employees in those fields.

"Vocational schools and technology centers have a huge part to play," she said.

She added that employers need to help retain and recruit new employees.

That includes: paying higher attention to workforce stability; training managers and supervisors in how to be better leaders; investing in technology centers through offering mentorships or apprenticeships; and have good relations with high school vocational and technical education teachers and high school counselors.

Gioia said other states including New Mexico are starting to pattern their programs after Oklahoma's successful system.

New Mexico officials were in Stillwater last month learning more about this state's CareerTech program.

"I hope you understand how fortunate you are," Gioia said.