

TALENTED HUDSON VALLEY

TRAINING & RETAINING THE REGION'S TOP TALENT



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A Message from our President

For the past two decades, business media outlets such as *Money*, *Forbes* and *Fast Money* have described the "War for Talent," sharing stories from the battlefield with tales of increasingly competitive recruitment and retention tactics. From major corporations to small businesses, companies are matching their frustrations with ingenuity, as owners must persistently adjust their workforce development strategies in order to find, engage, train and retain talent.

Now, with the emerging "on-demand economy," and nearly all of the new jobs created in the last decade falling under the category of "alternative work arrangements" such as gigs or contractors, many job-seekers (and the companies themselves) are forging new employment patterns and employer-employee relationships. In this environment, companies who still want an in-house workforce are finding it tough to recruit, and the ones who are hiring are faced with rising wages and increased competition for labor.

A booming Hudson Valley economy is putting new demands on a stretched-thin talent pool. Talent is key to the success for any organization. Not just diligent workers willing to put in long hours, but motivated global thinkers and creative strategists who possess specialized skills

However, there's no single magic formula for building your company's talent base. And, while the days of want ads are over, businesses must attract skilled workers by offering prospective employees something more than just a plain job description and competitive salary.

That is why we are bringing you *Talented*, HVEDC's first foray into sharing who's innovating, training employees in new and exciting ways and how the Hudson Valley's burgeoning business community is meeting the challenges of finding and educating talent head-on.

Enjoy!



Laurence P. Gottlieb
President and CEO
Hudson Valley Economic
Development Corp.



A Growing Hunger for Food Marketing Expertise

The Hudson Valley has established its position as a national leader in growing food and beverage companies. Bolstered by efforts like the HVEDC's Food & Beverage Alliance, there are now more than 5,000 businesses employing nearly 60,000 people in the field throughout the region.

SUNY New Paltz is doing its part in preparing the next generation workforce for what that growth is demanding. The school launched a Food Marketing program last year – a track within its School of Business – teaching students the specialized skills they need to assume key roles within this burgeoning sector in category management, merchandising, retail and sales.

"When we looked around and saw the Hudson Valley growth, which is incredible around food and beverage, we decided to make sure we were playing our part and integrating into how local and regional business is growing," said Dr. Russell Zwanka, a professor with the SUNY New Paltz School of Business who is leading the Food Marketing effort. "Food and beverage was the place to go."

The program, which already has about 100 junior and senior students enrolled, aims to strengthen community and regional engagement within the food and beverage industry. Only a handful of postsecondary institutions across the country offer food marketing as an area of study, and even fewer dive deeply into category management. The fact that the New Paltz track does provide focused attention to this niche expertise within the food and beverage industry has been a differentiator for the program.

"No one else is teaching category management here in the Northeast, and very few are teaching it in the country," said Zwanka. "It's been something that has made companies want to engage directly with us."

At a basic level, category management is the commonly accepted practice of breaking down similar products into a broad range of categories. Zwanka

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Engineering Talent at The Chazen Companies



The Chazen Companies operates in a competitive field, with multiple projects underway at any given time, and a lot of moving parts. It can all make for a demanding work environment, but the Poughkeepsie-based civil engineering services firm has been able to hire and retain top-notch professionals.

“We don’t have a big problem with retention,” said company president Mark Kastner. “Our turnover rate last year was only 6 percent, which is low for our industry and, I think, pretty low in general.”

Recent studies have shown turnover rates across all industries averaging around 14% in the Northeast, and 15% specifically in New York. Kastner points to key efforts that have led to the company’s success.

For one, Chazen offers a solid benefits package and comfortable offices. They also keep an eye out to make sure hard-working employees also have time for kids’ Little League games, concerts and other activities. Helping employees maintain that healthy work/life balance prevents burnout, and certainly contributes to the fact that Chazen employees tend to stay there for the long term.

A bigger challenge for the company has been recruiting the right people, especially in the areas of engineering, surveying and corporate leadership.

“In the Dutchess County marketplace, we’re all looking for the same skill set and same type of employee,” says Lauren Gillett, vice president of human resources at Chazen. “We have managed to hire excellent employees, and the efforts we are making are multipronged.”

Chazen has a robust employee referral program in place, which has landed the company a considerable number of top-performing people in recent years, from entry- to upper-level positions. Incentives to current employees for referring talent to Chazen range from \$750 up to \$7500.

In 2015, nearly 58% of new hires came from the employee referral program. That number climbed to 65% in 2016.

“The program has been, and continues to be, a significant source of quality hires for us,” said Gillett. “And, regardless of the amount of incentive money we’ve offered, our employees have always referred very talented people to us.”

Chazen also works closely with several of the region’s colleges and universities to find talented people to fill junior and entry-level positions. The company has had great recruiting success traveling to nearby colleges for job fairs, including Syracuse University and its affiliated SUNY ESF (College of Environmental Science & Forestry), Manhattan College in Riverdale, and RPI in Troy. Schools more far afield also figure into the Chazen’s plan, although recruiting is done remotely.

“Northeastern University, SUNY Buffalo – we have strong relationships with them, but we just don’t physically get to their career fairs,” said Gillett. “Virginia Tech is another great example – excellent engineering programs, but just not quite in our backyard.”

Kastner is an alumnus of Clarkson University, an institution with which the company has a strong partnership.

“We choose to work with colleges that offer the kinds of courses that teach the kind of employees we need,” said Gillett. “Clarkson’s a great fit, Mark’s an alum, and we have a number of employees who are Clarkson grads.”

As the competition for talent intensifies, the Chazen Companies is continuing to explore innovative ways to find, hire and retain the best employees possible.

“You hear the term “War for Talent,” said Gillett. “It’s a very real thing, and certainly not just for Chazen.”

Go to www.chazencompanies.com for more information on the firm.

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A Growing Hunger for Food Marketing

explained that these concepts can be difficult to teach, but the School of Business saw the value it presented to students as they prepared for their careers.

"We're teaching our students what companies want new hires to know," he says. "Every company would have to hire a marketing major and then train them in category management. We have them rounding second as they graduate, instead of standing at first."

During the fall 2016/2017 semester, six different companies, including top tier companies like Kellogg's, visited the New Paltz campus and interviewed 14 to 15 students at a time.

"I've been told that there are going to be some job offers," said Zwanka. "I expect at least our top 5% of graduates are going to be taken."

In developing their own program, SUNY New Paltz looked to existing programs at institutions including Western Michigan University and St. Joseph's College in New York. Both are quite comprehensive in their academic offerings and have successfully placed students in well-paying jobs after graduation.

Initial outcomes have been extremely positive, and the Food Management program is still in its infancy. Zwanka sees it as being in its second of four stages now, and intends to continue to grow the program and its curriculum as the needs of its students and regional employers change.

Stage one was development. Stage two, implementation, has proven to be swift and successful. Stage three is evolution.

"For example, we have a good relationship with the Culinary Institute," said Zwanka. "I'd like to see that develop into an even more comprehensive food education program that plays on the strengths of both schools."

Farther into the future, Zwanka envisions Food Management as standalone undergrad major, with potential for development into a graduate program. To that end, Zwanka would like to increase the program's sponsorship and funding.

"We can really get the word out if we have funding, so we're always looking for that," he said. HVEDC is a key strategic advisor.

The Food Management program is about to hit its first big milestone this May, when its first graduates will walk at SUNY New Paltz's commencement ceremony.

For more information, go to www.newpaltz.edu/schoolofbusiness/foodmarketing.



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June 23, 2017 at SUNY New Paltz

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