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**Gwenda Thompson,
President/CEO, Treasure
Coast Workforce
Development Board**

Tune Into Your Future: Treasure Coast Youth Career Awareness Campaign

In August 2005, The Workforce Development Board of the Treasure Coast was one of fifteen recipients of a Florida BEST (Business Employment Solutions and Training) grant from Workforce Florida, Inc. (WFI). The BEST initiative is a new strategy developed by WFI for competitively allocating its council awarded funds and was developed to encourage regions, through a cross-council competitive funding opportunity, to develop innovative solutions to local challenges.

Treasure Coast’s BEST project addressed two critical regional needs, workers skilled in good-paying, high demand jobs in the healthcare industry and the trades, plus workers with the skills demanded by one of Florida’s emerging industries — biotechnology.

The Treasure Coast BEST project included a career awareness campaign charged with creating a pipeline of talented and skilled workers for demand and emerging industries in the region. The campaign provided career information for high-skilled, high-valued occupations to at-risk youth, in-school youth, parents, career counselors, and teachers.

According to Gwenda Thompson, President/CEO of the Workforce Development Board of the Treasure Coast, “The BEST grant provided us with the resources to increase the knowledge of our local youth, parents, teachers and guidance counselors on the emerging and demand occupations. Career awareness is an essential foundation to making the right decisions about education and job training that lead to successful employment. Our goal is to equip youth with the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully enter and compete in the Treasure Coast labor market. Our hope is that students and parents who benefited from the BEST project will follow through on what they learned.”

Workforce Marketing Associates LLC (WMA) was contracted to design, develop, and implement a marketing/public relations campaign targeting middle and high school students, their parents, teachers, guidance counselors, and other youth and adults in four counties: Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee, and St. Lucie. The purpose of the campaign was to educate the target population on the high-skill demand jobs both current and emerging on the Treasure Coast, and the education and training available to prepare workers for these jobs. The primary goal was to get as many of the target population to Treasure Coast One-Stop Career Centers, and to the web sites (tcyouth.org, tcjobs.org) so they would learn more about training opportunities available to them and increase enrollments.

WMA was charged with designing a creative and multi-faceted campaign that would provide multiple marketing touches to target populations. To that end WMA designed several collateral pieces and involved community leaders in getting the word out. The theme, “Tune Into Your Future”, was selected to incorporate a fun love of music while focusing youth on the importance of their future career planning.

The campaign directly involved youth through a focus group of high school students assembled to review web site templates and other messaging for appeal to peers. Focus group participants also served on a team to review and select calendar artwork design winners. Each participant received a gift certificate to their choice of an electronics store, movie theatre, or music download provider for their efforts.



High school students in the four-county area, as well as in local youth programs, were invited to participate in a calendar design contest to further the theme “Tune Into Your Future”. Nearly 40 creative submissions developed using various media were received, and a review group of judges selected 13 entries for inclusion in the calendar. The cover entry was also used for t-shirts distributed at a Youth Summit held during the course of the campaign. The cover design winner received an iPod, and other winners received gift certificates for their choice of movie theaters, electronics store, or music download provider.

WMA created a calendar which included information related to the campaign to excite youth about planning their futures, to help them make informed career decisions, and to direct them to the tcyouth.org website. The calendar also included a letter to parents/guardians, teachers, and guidance counselors with statistics and options for higher education. Calendars were distributed through school districts, youth groups, churches, at career fairs, and at the youth summit to 30,000 youth in the four-county target area.

A web site was developed during the campaign which targeted high school, middle school, and out of school youth as well as parents, teachers, and counselors. All marketing activities drove traffic to the web site for further information.

Movie theatre advertising in three large area theatres was targeted at high school students, middle school students, and adults. Three brochures were developed as part of this campaign and distributed to high school students, middle school students, and parents of high school students. Four different posters carrying the campaign theme were developed and posted throughout area high schools and area youth programs.

The campaign supported an annual youth summit which drew more than 300 youth. This campaign contributed t-shirts with the winning calendar contest design imprinted, four engraved iPods distributed as prizes for attendees from each county, participation on the event planning committee, development and distribution of a press release, and development of post cards, posters, and flyers for the event.

Other aspects of the campaign included regular public relations, an e-newsletter, newspaper advertising, attendance at career fairs and career awareness workshops, and three open house events held at the local One-Stop Career Centers during the week of May 22 -24, designated as Treasure Coast Workforce Appreciation Week.

The original goal to touch 5,000 through this campaign was exceeded by more than 1200%. And, the overall grant trained at least 760, a significant increase over the grant goal of just under 700.

“Workforce Marketing did a superb job reaching our intended audience;” said Thompson, “they conducted the right market research and produced creative solutions and materials that were right on target and cost effective.”

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