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Workforce Snohomish Receives \$314,000 Grant to Strengthen Retail Industry Career Services in Snohomish County

Funding is part of a \$10.9 million grant awarded to The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership from the Walmart Foundation

Everett, Washington, Sept. 7, 2016 – Today, the Walmart Foundation announced that Workforce Snohomish has been selected to receive a \$314,000 grant from The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership (The Partnership) as part of an effort to increase the economic mobility of workers in retail and adjacent sectors in Snohomish County and around the U.S.

Workforce Snohomish is one of 10 Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) selected across the country to collectively form and implement new models of career services specific to retail – models that will serve as best practices for the approximately 550 WDBs in the U.S. that already provide career services, such as career coaching, soft skills training, specialized skills training and referrals to other resources. The funding is part of a \$10.9 million grant the Walmart Foundation made to The Partnership in March 2016.

“Our collaborative effort with The Partnership, Snohomish County business leaders and government officials, and the nine other selected WDBs will allow us to foster workforce training innovation in a sector where WDBs have not traditionally focused,” said Erin Monroe, Chief Executive Officer. “With the retail industry supporting one in four American jobs, this grant presents a tremendous potential for impact, from entry-level to middle skills jobs. The goal of this grant is to create clear career pathways in retail for hundreds of workers, providing skills training and new approaches to accelerate career advancement.”

The funding provided to Workforce Snohomish from The Partnership will provide a variety of services to job seekers, including:

- Job readiness training customized to the retail sector, including helping jobseekers acquire the "soft skills" that are critical for workplace success such as teamwork, leadership, communication and conflict resolution.
- Job placement assistance, resume writing help and interviewing skills workshops.
- Post placement services to promote job retention.

Among the services Workforce Snohomish will offer employers are:

- Serving as a point of contact for retail employers in the area for recruiting and training opportunities, including career tracks such as sales, customer service, logistics, merchandising/buying and management.
- Customized recruiting and screening and assistance in writing job descriptions for new positions.
- Employee retention assistance and improving the supply of qualified job candidates.

Approximately 200 people across Snohomish County will benefit from The Partnership grant during the first year.

Workforce Snohomish is partnering with Everett Community College to provide a Retail Management Certificate program that will culminate in an industry recognized credential. Students can earn the Retail Management Certificate in 3 quarters, and can opt to continue to their education towards an Associate of Technical Arts degree in Business Administration that is transferrable to 4-year universities. Retailers have indicated they are very willing to accommodate students' schedules to allow them to work and participate in the Retail Management program.

Workforce Snohomish has also formed a Retail Advisory Board made up of local retailers including Fred Meyer, Costco, Everett Mall, Lowe's Home Improvement, Walgreens, Nike Factory Store, PCC Natural Markets, CVS Pharmacy, Coach Outlet, and Bartell Drugs to ensure that local employers are providing input into the program. Retail career fairs and employer panels are also planned.

Snohomish County has over 2,000 retailers resulting in \$6.3 billion in taxable retail sales in 2015. The 2015 Washington State Employment Security Department Gap Analysis indicated a significant gap in the supply of appropriate candidates to fill open positions. Employers are especially concerned about recruiting qualified applicants to fill critical upcoming holiday positions.

"As one of the largest provider of jobs for the American workforce, the retail industry presents many opportunities for workers to grow and thrive," said Kathleen McLaughlin, President of the Walmart Foundation and chief sustainability officer for Walmart. "Through our work with The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership, we are helping ensure that retail workers have the skills, training and education needed to build long-lasting careers."

In February 2015, Walmart and the Walmart Foundation committed \$100 million over five years to strengthen the skills of the broader U.S. workforce by funding programs to create career paths in retail and related industries and train thousands of workers outside of Walmart. The two-year grant to The Partnership is the largest investment to date as part of Walmart and the Walmart Foundation's Opportunity initiative, which aims to increase the economic mobility of workers in retail and adjacent sectors by working with nonprofits, educational institutions and government agencies to make it easier for frontline workers to move faster into middle skills roles.

Workforce Snohomish is a business-led governing group charged with preparing, supporting, and growing the current and future workforce of Snohomish County. The objective of the Workforce Snohomish board is to inform, align, and advance education, government, business, labor, industry, and community services to work collaboratively to address workforce needs.

For more information about the grant awarded to the Workforce Snohomish, visit <http://workforceboard.org/about-us/funders-and-partners/grants/wal-mart-foundation-grant>

Learn more about Workforce Snohomish at www.WorkforceSnohomish.org

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