

More Job Opportunities Looming

April 6, 2006?

Reported by Vince Atkinson

The petrochemical industry has been a cornerstone for Southwest Louisiana's economy for years. As more and more baby boomers prepare for retirement, the number of local job openings at area plants is expected to boom. The Lake Area Industry Alliance has already started the recruitment process. Some students are even learning about future opportunities before they graduate from high school. Thursday, more than 700 Barbe High School students in Lake Charles heard about some local job opportunities that will soon be up for grabs.

Todd Griffen with ConocoPhillips Inc. said, "Over the next five years we are estimating off of our demographics that we will need locally, over 500 operators." In order to help fill this future void in labor, the Lake Area Industry Alliance is traveling all around Southwest Louisiana letting "soon to be" college students know about some of the perks of becoming a process operator. According to Griffen, the starting salary for a process operator is between \$40,000 and \$60,000, but you have to have the right education in order to land one of these coveted jobs.

Lake Area Industry Alliance Intern Karen Lambert said, "It's not who you know anymore, it's what you know. The plants are not hiring based on who you know, it's what you know." Historically, the majority of plant operators have been men, but industry experts say times are changing. Lambert said, "The focus has been on promoting the program to women. In current years they are doing an excellent job. We want to diversify our force, we want to include women, minorities, and anyone else we can get the message to."

Both McNeese State University and Sowela Technical Community College offer process technology programs. Judging by the interest students showed at Barbe High School on Thursday, neither school will have to look very hard to find people ready to enroll. For more information on a summer camp being held specifically for high school girls interested in process technology, call Dorothy Ortego with McNeese State University at (337) 475-5844.

KPLC-TV, Lake Charles, LA