

The Land of Lincoln Workforce
Innovation Board Presents:

**2024 Individual
Achievement and
Business Partnership
Awards**

LLWA | Land of Lincoln
Workforce Alliance

Serving the Counties of Cass, Christian, Logan, Menard, and Sangamon

Training • Connecting • Developing • Illinois'
Workforce



Individual Achievement Awards

- Cass County — Walker Petersen — SIUE Water Quality Control Operations Program
- Christian County — Danielle Dennis — Lake Land Community College Dental Hygiene Degree Program
- Logan County — Jennifer Clark – Capital Area School of Practical Nursing Licensed Practical Nursing Program
- Menard County — Markita Alexis — Illinois Central College Associates Degree in Nursing Program
- Sangamon County — Jerry Taylor — 160 Driving Academy Commercial Truck Driver Training Program

Individual Achievement Awards – Partner Nominations

- Capital Area Career Center — Quentin Douglas — Skilled Trades Essentials Youth Program (HVAC)
- Fishes & Loaves Vocational Center — Kiara Masters — Pathways to Success Youth Program & Certified Nursing Assistant Program

Business Leadership and Partnership Awards

Mel-O-Cream International



Illinois Manufacturing Excellence Center



Walker Petersen

Walker Petersen, age 19, now 20, graduated from high school in May of 2022. After a few summers having interned with the City of Beardstown's Sanitary District and gaining interest in water purification systems, he decided to pursue training in the field. He successfully completed the Water Quality Control Operations program at Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville. Throughout his training, Walker consistently earned A's and B's and participated in two internships. Prior to his graduation, Walker secured permanent, full-time employment with the City of Beardstown's Sanitation Department earning \$8.00 more per hour than he had as a summer worker. Walker has also since been put in charge of on-line training programs, and has also received his Class 4 Waste Water license. When asked about his experience, Walker stated that he feels very fortunate to have found what he wants to do for a living so early in his life.



Christian County

Individual Achievement Award

Danielle Dennis

Danielle Dennis was once unable to obtain employment that lead to self-sufficient or higher wages through career services alone. She was underemployed averaging 20-22 hours per week as a cashier earning \$17.00 per hour. In the 24 months prior to her training, her previous part-time employment with Orpheum Theatre also ended more than once due to COVID. Danielle had been struggling financially and she decided to enroll in the Dental Hygiene program at Lake Land College to increase her skills so she could earn a higher wage in an in-demand occupation to better support herself. Danielle wanted to be a Dental Hygienist because she has always “loved going to the dentist and talking to them about teeth.” She wants to be able to help people feel confident in their smile. Danielle’s commute was 118.8 miles round trip between her home in Taylorville to Lake Land College in Mattoon, Illinois each day. Lake Land is the only Dental Hygiene program in the region. She was very grateful for the transportation



assistance she received. Without it there was no way she could have carried the burden with high gas prices. Danielle’s perseverance, dedication, and many journeys to Lake Land’s campus finally paid off. She graduated with her degree on May 6th, 2024 and became a licensed Dental Hygienist on May 28th, 2024. During this period of time she also immediately secured training-related employment with 21st Century Dental earning \$40.29 per hour.



Jennifer Clark

After having worked as a Nursing Assistant for approximately twelve years, and raising two children on her own, Jennifer decided that it was time for her to further pursue her education in the nursing field in order to earn a more suitable wage to support a family of three. She also felt confident and ready to take on additional responsibilities. Jennifer enrolled in the Practical Nursing program at the Capital Area School of Practical Nursing where she successfully completed her training and passed her NCLEX exam. She is now working as a Licensed Practical Nurse in Lincoln, and increased her hourly rate of pay by \$11.00 per hour. Jennifer is also grateful for the transportation support services she received as she was required to travel approximately 80 miles round trip five days each week for training. This extra support really helped her with the transportation expenses each week. Jennifer is now also working towards completing the admissions process for the BSN program at St. John's School of Nursing in hopes of starting this training in August of 2025.



Menard County

Individual Achievement Award

Markita Alexis

In 2019 Markita came to the Land of Lincoln Workforce Alliance, completed her training at the Capital Area School of Practical Nursing, and attained her LPN license. She flourished in her work experience as an LPN, working two jobs and completing nursing pre-requisites, and supporting a family of four. She returned to us in 2023 with the ambition to further pursue her education in the nursing career pathway to increase her skills in order to earn a higher wage in an in-demand occupation to help support her family, and enrolled in the nursing degree program at Illinois Central College. Despite being a single parent of three teenagers, working, and traveling over 140 miles round trip each day to and from training, Markita persevered, maintaining her grades and clinical requirements. She successfully attained her Healthcare Professional to RN Associates Degree in Applied Science in May of 2024. She passed the NCLEX exam on her first attempt, which is the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses, and attained her Registered Professional Nurse License. She is now employed with Vonderlieth Living Center as a Registered Nurse earning \$40.00



per hour. Markita is grateful for all of the assistance, support, and opportunities she has received from the WIOA program to help her achieve her professional goals of becoming a nurse so that she can be an inspiration to her children. On behalf of the Land of Lincoln Workforce Board it is our honor to be able to present the 2024 Individual Participant Achievement Award for Menard County to Markita Alexis.



Jerry Taylor — QUEST

Jerry Taylor was eligible for and participated in the DWG QUEST Program. He had been unemployed for more than 10 years and faced several barriers to employment. Despite that, Jerry was determined not to be detoured in achieving his occupational goal as a Truck Driver. Due to his persistence, hard work, and dedication, Jerry passed his exams and attained his CDL in January of 2024. Upon completion of his training he did not waste any time conducting his job search. He actually received a few different job offers within a short period of time, and ended up settling on employment with HTH Companies. His starting rate of pay is \$28.00 an hour with full benefits, including life insurance, education assistance, and a 401K plan. After only 8 months on the job he has also received a promotion, and is now working as the 3rd shift supervisor which allows him to save money for his own truck, furthering his long-term goal of owning his own trucking business. In addition, Jerry hopes

to mentor others about how to change their life paths for the better. Jerry also started volunteering at the Urban Justice Center.



Quentin Douglas — Capital Area Career Center

Quentin Douglas was a bright participant in Capital Area Career Center’s Skilled Trades Essentials Program (STEP) for Youth. During his training, Quentin consistently demonstrated a stellar work ethic, skill mastery, and leadership abilities. These qualities helped Quentin earn his EPA and OSHA certifications while enrolled in STEP. His efforts placed him at the top of the class both in the classroom setting and in the shop. One instructor said that “Quentin was always eager to learn more. He always asked for more work and more opportunities to hone his skills.” In search of those opportunities, Quentin then went on to Lincoln Land Community College’s HVAC training following the Skilled Trades Essentials Program. WIOA funding allowed for Quentin to expand his skills into the world of HVAC, and he is now successfully employed at Allied Heating and Cooling.



Kiara Masters — Fishes & Loaves

Kiara Masters was a hardworking student at Fishes and Loaves Vocational Center who successfully pursued her goal of becoming a Certified Nursing Assistant and entering the healthcare workforce. Kiara participated in F.L.A.M.E.S., the Fishes and Loaves Academy of Motivation Empowering Students. Kiara also took on extra tutoring when needed. All of Kiara’s hard work culminated in her current employment at St. John’s Hospital. She is currently studying and preparing to take her TEAS test to begin attending LPN (Licensed Practical Nurse) classes in February of 2025. She credits her participation in the WIOA Program as giving her more confidence and enabling her to provide exceptional support and services to her patients.



Business Partnership Award Mel-O-Cream International



Mel-O-Cream International, a beloved Springfield, IL staple, continues to lead and enhance Local Workforce Area 20. In addition to participating in the On-the-Job Training program earlier in 2024, Mel-O-Cream demonstrated a leadership role within the local workforce by successfully engaging with a project requiring the formation of partnerships between the Land of Lincoln Workforce Alliance (LLWA) and IMEC.

This LLWA/IMEC manufacturer training project provided invaluable benefits to Mel-O-Cream. And, the partnership with LLWA and IMEC provided a solution to the various financial and logistical challenges associated with a training program such as this, also strengthening IMEC's leadership role within our local workforce.

We are proud to extend to Mel-O-Cream International and the Larson family our Business Partnership Award. Thank you for your efforts!



Business Partnership Award

Illinois Manufacturing Excellence Center (IMEC)



Over the past 10 months, the Land of Lincoln Workforce Alliance and IMEC coordinated to provide occupational, workforce, management, leadership, and DEIA trainings as part of LLWA's state-funded, innovative, sector-based manufacturing project. This project was a response to local manufacturers' calls for more occupational skills training opportunities and funding.

As this was a large and multi-faceted undertaking, the success of the project relied on robust planning, careful implementation, well-developed strategies, and strong partnerships with several stakeholders and businesses. IMEC has a qualified team of industry-improvement experts who tackle tough workforce challenges and instill best practices across all aspects of organizations. They are dedicated to providing small and mid-sized manufacturers in Illinois with the tools and techniques to excel and compete globally.

The project resulted in high-quality manufacturing training for 198 employees across 6 separate companies. The training encompassed the topics of Continuous Improvement, Quality Systems, and Workforce Development.

Additionally, IMEC sub-contracted CDL training in order for one local manufacturer to address costs associated with delivery of their products. Land of Lincoln Workforce Alliance was also able to undergo up-to-date DEIA training to better ensure positive and constructive interactions with any and all customers.

The return on these investments will not only greatly benefit these manufacturers and these employees, but they will positively impact our local workforce and economic development in many ways for years to come.

Thank you, IMEC!