

## **\$173,000 for job skill training**

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Opportunities Industrialization Center of Wilson has been awarded \$173,000 from the N.C. Tobacco Trust Fund Commission to continue helping dislocated workers find jobs and improve their job skills through a program called Project New Start.

The money will fund the third phase of the program, which has been in operation in Wilson since February 2004.

The trust fund approved grants totaling \$3.2 million for 25 projects statewide. Several of the projects will serve residents of Wilson, Nash, Greene and Johnston counties.

"These grants will serve critical needs throughout the state to help retool for 21st century agriculture," said Billy Carter, who chairs the commission. "The commission has selected some outstanding projects to support. They range from developing new market opportunities for North Carolina farmers to work force development programs designed to put people back to work in high-growth jobs."

Howard Jones of Wilson OIC said his staff is excited about receiving the funding, and he is looking forward to another good year for Project New Start. Jones said the \$173,000 is about half of the funding OIC requested. He is looking at other funding sources for the program.

Wilson OIC got involved with Project New Start after the N.C. Rural Center sought out community-based groups to partner with on the program. Jones said this year OIC applied directly to the commission for the funding, instead of going through the Rural Center, because Jones said some of the other counties involved with Project New Start have not been quite as successful. Other counties initially involved in Project New Start included Vance, Transylvania, Henderson and Buncombe.

During Phase 2 of Project New Start, Jones said OIC served 373 people and placed 171 of them in jobs. The Phase 2 budget was around \$182,000.

Other funded projects with area ties included:

\* \$121,000 to Greene County for developing the Elaney Wood Family Heritage Farm and Alternative Agriculture Training Center. The program will focus on supporting

"tobacco-dependent individuals interested in diversification by developing a comprehensive strategic plan, designs for an agricultural training center, development of marketing and tourism plans, and relocation of existing buildings to the project site."

\* \$40,000 to the North Carolina Sweet Potato Commission Foundation in Smithfield for expanding markets and fresh N.C. sweet potatoes.

\* \$300,000 to the Tobacco Communities Reinvestment Project for farmers in 24 counties, including Wilson, Wayne, Greene, Johnston and Nash, to develop diversified agricultural enterprises to replace or supplement their tobacco income, to ensure the stability of intergenerational farming operations, and to create and maintain quality employment in target areas.

\* \$150,000 to Telamon Corporation to provide work force training to dislocated farm workers in Johnston and Sampson counties.

\* \$242,000 to Project Skill-Up for work force development programs at various community colleges, including Lenoir Community College, which serves Greene County residents.

The trust fund commission's funding comes from major cigarette manufacturers as a result of the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement. The General Assembly created the commission in 2000 with the goal of lessening the impact of the declining tobacco industry on affected farmers, workers and businesses.

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