

Internships draw students back home

It's what mothers yearn for, left-behind friends anticipate and former employers hope for: the return of our budding college students from their school experience.

Kids coming home for the summer or holidays are a boost to our economy, our workforce and our rural world. They bring back a whole year of experiences, both educational and social, and they fill the pipeline of workers at companies that benefit from the burst of enthusiasm and energy that comes from their fresh perspective.

How well do we listen? What good ideas would they offer up from their time away that would breathe new life into our community and our businesses? What seeds do we plant to bring them back summer after summer? Offering an internship experience is an excellent way to inject new ideas into a status quo operation. Sowing the seeds of succession and enriching the career perspective with practical application of principles is time well spent with these young millennials.

How about sweetening the pot with scholarships in exchange for starting a career with a hometown company? One restaurant in the area offers an increasingly large scholarship to entice high school waiters and cooks who realize their job is working them toward a future. What a great employee retention strategy!

Another restaurant chain offers students a scholarship for nearly half of their educational expenses in exchange for a work commitment. A technology company starts with high school juniors, providing a \$2,500 yearly college scholarship for a work commitment of 30 hours a week. Not a bad deal for either party, reaping rewards now and later.

If we wish to keep brain drain from affecting our workforce, we must look at a variety of strategies to plant hometown seeds in our young talent so they think long and hard about planting themselves back home after graduation. Relationships must be cultivated and nurtured.

Courting young people who have taken leave to earn their educational credentials makes more sense than spending countless greenbacks on recruiting unknowns who have no knowledge of the place we call home.

Employers have invested in sending students away to earn their degrees and paid for a major portion of their education in exchange for a multi-year commitment to work at the company. Reneging on the arrangement requires the student to reimburse the educational expenses. Professional practices – including doctors, dentists and lawyers – have used this approach to keep their services available and growing.

The power of connection in luring people back cannot be overstated. Families, friends and previous co-workers all have cause to



Susan Nickerson

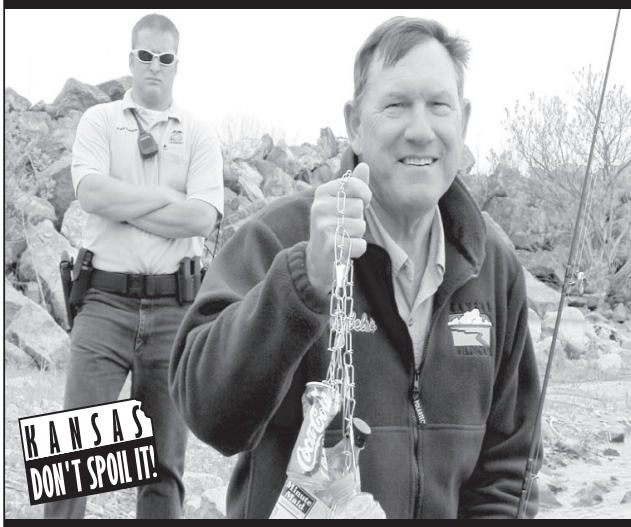
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consider options and possibilities back home in a place they lived, loved, learned and blossomed.

In an economy where workforce numbers are wilting, it behooves us all to be cultivators, planting the seeds to bring them back home. The harvest could prove to be a bumper crop!

Susan Nickerson is west regional director for KansasWorks, workforce development.

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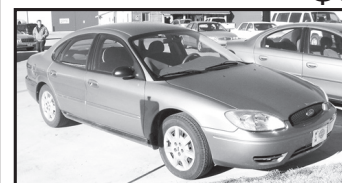
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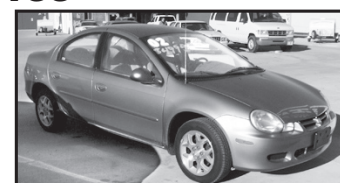
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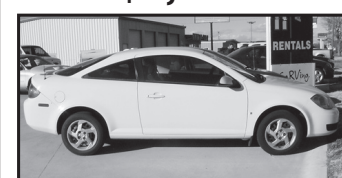
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