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**Benton County announces with  
Kirkwood Community College and other  
economic development partners the following:**

*FOR RELEASE: Thursday, Jan. 10, 2008, 10 a.m.*

**KIRKWOOD AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS ANNOUNCE SKILLS  
ADVANTAGE RESEARCH STUDY:**

**First in the Nation Report Shows Strengths and Opportunities in  
Corridor Workforce**

Two years ago it was a first in the region employer-led skills initiative. Now the Skills Advantage partnership has released a first in the nation research study to reinforce the workforce readiness effort. Kirkwood Community College and area business partners announced results of the study at a presentation Thursday, Jan. 10 at the college's new Kirkwood Center for Continuing Education.

In 2006 the Skills Advantage program, a cooperative venture between Kirkwood and area employers, was launched. Now 90 Corridor companies now use the assessment tools in their hiring processes. The six-month research study was conducted by Kirkwood Continuing Education and Training Services staff, with the cooperation of area economic development groups and 48 area employers using the Skills Advantage worker assessments.

Kirkwood Vice President of Continuing Education and Training Services Dee Baird calls the study "exciting and valuable information" for the regional economy.

"We know today's jobs require more education and training than ever before. It is important that the Technology Corridor take the lead to design and use programs ensuring all workers have the necessary skills to succeed and help the region continue its successful economic development efforts," Baird said.

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The Kirkwood team was comprised of Dee Baird, vice president of Continuing Education and Training Services; Dr. Heidi Hansel, director of Institutional Research; Amy Lasack, Skills Advantage program director; Kim Johnson, executive director of Continuing Education Programming; and Karen Friederich, department assistant. The external project team included Ranae Becker, Benton Development Group; Linda Yoder, Iowa County Skills Advantage Research Project supervisor; Joe Raso, Iowa City Area Development Group; Jennifer Fischer, Jones County Economic Development Commission; Mark Seckman, Priority One; Steve Lacina, Cedar County Economic Development Commission; and Ed Raber, Washington Economic Development Group.

Highlights of the Skills Advantage Research Study include:

- An assessment of 400 randomly selected incumbent workers from 48 Corridor companies, conducted over a six-month period in later 2007.
- Each worker completed one of three assessments, measuring the essential job skills of Applied Mathematics, Reading for Information and Locating Information.
- The age of workers studied ranged from 20 to 68 years, with an average of 41 years. Length of time at their employers ranged from 1 to 46 years, with an average of 21 years in the workforce.

Study results showed worker skill certification in the three skills areas at:

- Applied Mathematics, 5 out of possible 7;
- Reading for Information at a level 6 out of 7; and
- Locating Information at level 4 out of possible 6.

Baird said one of the research findings was a correlation of assessment scores to age groups of incumbent workers surveyed.

“We found encouraging educational levels in our younger demographic groups. For example, in the 20-30 year range, 55 percent have bachelor’s degrees or better. These educational levels correspond favorably with skill levels in the essential areas we measured in the study as well,” Baird added

Mercy Iowa City CEO, Ronald R. Reed spoke in support of Skills Advantage and the research study. He called the project “part of an evolution of several years of partnership” between the parties.

“The Skills Advantage program grew out of the Skills 2000 and Skills 2006 studies. That research recommended that area businesses require workers to acquire assessments and certifications in the areas of essential and technical skills. We also urged educational institutions to look for opportunities to adapt their curriculum accordingly. These recommendations directly led to this Skills Advantage initiative. We felt strongly our area employers join together to communicate as one voice. Today, we are pleased to say the Skills Advantage initiative has grown to 90 area employers,” Reed added.

ACT, Inc. of Iowa City developed the WorkKeys skills assessment that is central to the Skills Advantage program. ACT CEO Dick Ferguson praised the area partnership and its fast-growing acceptance.

“We congratulate the Corridor as the first in the nation to develop this regional benchmark for incumbent workers to identify its capable workforce. ACT is proud to be part of a movement that is sweeping the nation, communicating incumbent worker capabilities to employers. This will have far-reaching advantages in economic development and encouraging business relocation and growth,” Ferguson said.

Kirkwood officials reported that more than 1,200 individuals have used Skills Advantage testing since early 2006, with 1,000-plus certificates awarded.

More information on the Skills Advantage initiative is available by contacting Amy Lasack at Kirkwood Community College, (319) 398-398-7194, e-mail: [Amy.lasack@kirkwood.edu](mailto:Amy.lasack@kirkwood.edu) ; or Dee Baird, [dee.baird@kirkwood.edu](mailto:dee.baird@kirkwood.edu) ; or your county economic development director.