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GOVERNOR WALKER VISITS BELOIT, GETS SNEAK PEEK AT CAREERTEK AND YMCA

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Austin Montgomery/Beloit Daily News Gov. Scott Walker (right) tours the Hendricks CareerTek workforce development center Wednesday morning. The center's director, Tina Salzman (right) will help coordinate student outreach and program development at the center.



BELOIT — As the Hendricks CareerTek youth workforce training facility opened its doors to the public for the first time Wednesday, officials welcomed Gov. Scott Walker on an early morning tour of the center, set to bring Beloit businesses closer with middle school and high school students.

The center will serve as a bridge between students and future career fields, from construction and manufacturing to information and technology development. The center broke ground last year thanks to a grant from the Hendricks Family Foundation to the Stateline Boys and Girls Club. The facility is strategically located in the Ironworks campus on Third Street, next to IronTek, Beloit's business incubator space, home to expanding technology firms including Comply365 and AccuLynx.

"This center will have a positive impact on the community in terms of helping students get a head start on what their career paths might be," Walker said. "A place like this really will help students then apply what they learned from those academic career plans and plug it into whatever path they might be on."

Walker stressed the need to link students with skilled working positions, and touted the state's unemployment rate being at a 16-year low, while overall employment approached all-time highs. Walker met with executives and staff from ABC Supply, Beloit College, Blackhawk Technical College, Comply365, Corporate Contractors Inc. and Hendricks Holdings on Wednesday's tour.

"Something that is of interest to us is seeing all of these Beloit companies are represented here," said ABC Supply founder Diane Hendricks. "This is truly an incubator for them, and there is a need to get everyone involved in this effort to reach out to our students."

Various company representatives said the need to connect students with proper development tools was critical as the entire baby boomer generation nears retirement age.

"We know not only for today, but for the future, we are going to have job openings," Walker said. "That's going to be critical in terms of workforce development and also it will be critical to further economic development at places here and across the state."

CareerTek Business and Education Director Tina Salzman will work with employers to determine what skills are needed in the local marketplace. Students may also reach out to Salzman and CareerTek on their own, be referred by a parent or through partnership channels with the School District. Although it's designed for students within the School District of Beloit, no student will be turned away.

"This is our opportunity to unpack what students are good at, and what they don't like to do," Salzman said. "We want our students to feel like they can come here and get the real-world skills they will need to feel ready to pursue something they are passionate about."

The center will offer various programs to interest students in career fields and develop a network of smaller clubs to develop skills.

Hendricks CareerTek will provide students with workshops and educational opportunities in high-demand career fields such as coding, healthcare, construction and trades, manufacturing and entrepreneurship. Students can also benefit from soft-skill boot camps, financial literacy seminars, speakers and coaching.

The center is also seeking to provide a space that can be utilized by businesses when students are not present. It may serve as a gathering space for business related events, business listening sessions and other related opportunities to benefit the business community.

Tours of CareerTek and the in-progress Stateline YMCA will continue Thursday afternoon at Ironworks on Third Street in downtown Beloit.