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News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
July 12, 2017

UpSkill Houston Releases Report on its Progress Since 2014 Launch

“Building Momentum” captures growth of strengthened workforce

HOUSTON— As it commemorates its third anniversary, the Greater Houston Partnership’s UpSkill Houston initiative today released a new report highlighting its efforts to close the region’s skills gap through an industry-led collaboration between businesses, educational institutions, social services organizations and government agencies.

Building Momentum documents UpSkill Houston’s winning strategy, widespread support across industry sectors, and life-changing outcomes. The report was compiled from interviews across the workforce ecosystem as well as with workers who have benefitted from the “upskilling” that the initiative advances.

“When I arrived at the Greater Houston Partnership in 2012, the common thread in my conversations with members was the lack of a much-needed, ‘middle-skilled’ workforce,” said Bob Harvey, the Partnership’s president and CEO. “Houston faced and continues to face a mismatch between the skills industry needs and those that job seekers possess. The problem will worsen as the region loses much of its aging workforce to retirement.”

Houston’s business leaders and employers are an essential ingredient in closing the skills gap, along with educational institutions, training and service providers, and philanthropists. Together these partners strive to expand the talent pipeline for the benefit of citizens and industry. The initiative provides resources, structure, convening opportunities, and an overarching approach to address the challenge.

“UpSkill Houston brings synergy and structure to this work,” said Barry Klein, General Manager, Shell Deer Park. “We have engaged key executives to lead this work and get the right folks collaborating. When the message comes from the people who own the problem, the impact is greater. If you’re not part of UpSkill Houston, you miss the value of having the whole work in concert.”

Building Momentum highlights the stories of several Houstonians who achieved financial stability for themselves and their families by upgrading their skills. “I wish I had known sooner that there was something I could do over a short-term that would prepare me to make a huge difference in my life,” said Cari Williams, a process

The Greater Houston Partnership works to make Houston one of the world’s best places to live, work, and build a business. It represents 11 counties: Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Liberty, Montgomery, San Jacinto, Walker and Waller. With more than 1,000 member organizations, the Partnership represents approximately one-fifth of the region’s workforce. Visit the Partnership at houston.org.

technician at ExxonMobil. Williams completed Lee College's ExxonMobil Process Technology Program, and now makes more than four times her wage earned at previous jobs.

"It's notable that over the last two years, as the energy industry has gone through a very challenging time, the demand for middle-skill workers has not lessened," said Gina Luna, CEO of Luna Strategies LLC, and chair of the UpSkill Houston Executive Committee. "The need does not resolve itself when the economy suffers, such as when oil prices drop. That says to me this is a long-term opportunity."

Building Momentum describes how UpSkill Houston seeks to close that gap by increasing the number of individuals who are trained for middle skills careers—those that require more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year degree—across the region. By 2024, between 50 and 60 percent of all jobs in Houston will require training beyond high school. These middle skills jobs can pay \$60,000 to \$90,000 a year plus benefits and offer a path for growth.

"Success for Houston's workers does not require a four-year degree," said Peter Beard, who leads the UpSkill Houston effort as senior vice president for Workforce Development at the Partnership. "But success for our regional economy *does* require a long-term plan to develop the talents and skills of our citizens."

The *Building Momentum* report cites evidence of UpSkill Houston achievements to date such as:

- a 32 percent increase in enrollment in the Community College Petrochemical Initiative (CCPI) schools' petrochemical programs in 2016 (CCPI is funded by ExxonMobil and led by Lee College, both of which are part of the UpSkill Houston Initiative),
- development of scalable prototypes to attract, train, and place workers in middle-skill positions in industrial and commercial construction,
- selection as one of seven regions to participate in the Communities That Work Partnership, an initiative of the U.S. Department of Commerce and the Aspen Institute designed to promote economic growth.

The next stage of UpSkill Houston's work is to raise awareness more broadly among middle and high school students about opportunities beyond high school. UpSkill Houston is creating outreach efforts targeted to students and their parents about the great jobs in Houston that don't require a four-year college degree. The message: Opportunity for a meaningful, rewarding career exists for those willing to act.

In addition to the student awareness campaign, UpSkill Houston will continue to build out employer-led councils in new industry sectors. Recently, executives from the region's health care systems met to establish a health care council, and there are conversations about developing a manufacturing or a port, maritime, and logistics council.

Visit Upskillhouston.org to find out more about the range of great middle-skill career opportunities available across the Houston region. The website provides potential workers with information about job types, training and educational requirements, salary ranges, and career pathways. The website also provides details on how businesses can get involved in the UpSkill Houston initiative.

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