



GREATER HOUSTON
PARTNERSHIP

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PRESS RELEASE

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EnergizeHouston and UpSkill Houston Join Forces

Innovative petrochemical initiative becomes first pillar in comprehensive workforce development effort

HOUSTON – The Greater Houston Partnership today announced the *EnergizeHouston* program will join *UpSkill Houston*, a major step toward addressing the region’s workforce challenges. The innovative petrochemical recruitment and training initiative officially becomes the first pillar in the Partnership’s comprehensive regional workforce initiative, providing Houstonians a direct portal to connect with training programs that prepare them for good jobs and careers.

In 2013, ExxonMobil and nine community colleges launched *EnergizeHouston* to attract, train and place workers in jobs within the petrochemical industry. Under the program through Lee College, Alvin Community College, Brazosport College, College of the Mainland, Galveston College, HCC, Lone Star College, San Jacinto College and Wharton County Junior College, hundreds of new workers are in training for highly-skilled trade and craft careers. The program offers information about career opportunities and training through www.energizehouston.org.

“*EnergizeHouston* is an incredible, innovative first step toward solving our petrochemical and construction shortage, but this challenge is far bigger than what one company can solve,” said Bob Harvey, President and CEO of the Greater Houston Partnership. “This combination adds an already strong and functioning job and training platform to *UpSkill Houston*, and allows us to greatly increase our ability to attract, train and place skilled workers in the seven industry sectors critical to our future: advanced manufacturing, industrial and commercial construction, health care, oil and gas, petrochemical, ports and maritime, and utilities.”

The Partnership launched *UpSkill Houston* in 2014, the nation’s first business-led, community-wide, integrated workforce effort. The initiative aims to address the skills gap in Houston by increasing the number of Texans trained for critical “middle skills” jobs – those requiring more than a high school education but less than a four-year college degree. Today, 1.4 million of 3.6 million jobs in Houston are considered middle skills jobs, and nearly 75,000 middle skills jobs will open annually from 2015 to 2017.

UpSkill Houston has three key objectives:

- **Attract** individuals to skilled jobs and professions in seven critical sectors
- **Train** individuals on the basic employability and technical skills necessary

- **Place** and retain individuals in critical skills jobs and professions

The initiative brings together industry, education, non-profit and community leaders to address the skills gap and other regional workforce challenges.

“Employers tell us every day they need more workers with better and more diverse skills. Helping people gain skills they need to compete for jobs will transform lives and strengthen our economy,” said Gina Luna, Chair of the Greater Houston Partnership and Chairman of JPMorgan Chase in Houston.

Matt Aguiar, Senior Vice President of ExxonMobil Chemical Company and co-chair of *UpSkill Houston’s* petrochemical committee, announced that ExxonMobil is investing an additional \$500,000 in the petrochemical training initiative, bringing its cumulative financial commitment to \$1.5 million. “We expect new industry investment to attract thousands of jobs to the Houston area as our industry capitalizes on the abundant, affordable supplies of U.S. natural gas to produce chemicals,” Aguiar said. “The community colleges are preparing area residents to fill these new jobs and launch satisfying careers in the petrochemical industry.”

The nine community colleges along the upper Texas gulf coast are working together to expand training opportunities and move students quickly from classroom to workplace.

“Enrollment in the nine Houston-area community college technical programs is on the rise,” said Dr. Dennis Brown, President of Lee College. “In process technology programs, for example, where students train to be process operators, we have seen enrollment numbers increase by an average of 15 percent a year over the last few years.”

The announcement was made at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo to highlight the organization’s long-standing commitment to education. Since 1932, the Show has provided nearly \$375 million to the youth of Texas and presented more than 15,500 scholarships since 1957, including \$12.9 million in scholarships in 2015. The Show’s scholarships were dedicated solely to four-year institutions, but the Show has announced it will expand its scholarship funding to support students enrolled at regional community colleges in degree programs that educate and train individuals for middle skill jobs.

“The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo has shown tremendous leadership and commitment to providing educational opportunity for Texans,” said Jennifer Hazelton, Chief Financial Officer. “By joining the effort to promote and invest in students attending community colleges, the Show has recognized the growing importance of these skilled jobs to our region’s future.”

“We need to improve the education and training for and the image of middle skill jobs,” said Bob Harvey. “People demean jobs that don’t require a four-year degree, even though these are often good, high-paying jobs that can help transform lives. They provide not only a good salary, but have a real career ladder with the potential for even more growth. These are careers and professions, not just jobs.”

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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 1,400 member organizations, the Partnership represents approximately one-fifth of the region’s workforce. Visit the Partnership at houston.org.