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## Employee credential program gets boost

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BY VALERIE WHITNEY, BUSINESS WRITER

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DAYTONA BEACH -- More than three years after the Florida Ready to Work employee credentialing program was introduced to the state, it has yet to make more than a dent among local businesses.

But officials with the Volusia Manufacturers Association are hoping to change that.

The association is taking part in a renewed marketing effort to introduce the idea to area businesses willing to recognize the credential when presented by a job seeker or employee.

"We have been asked to help get the word out about the program so that more companies recognize the credential," said Jayne Fifer, VMA president. "This will help our state be more competitive in attracting companies with good jobs,"

Fifer said her office will be working with Kathy Fletcher, the program's Central Florida coordinator, to raise awareness of the free program, which was developed in 1992.

So far, Fifer said, she is aware of only 17 local businesses that recognize the program.

Florida Ready to Work was developed by the same firm that developed the ACT test for college-bound students. It is designed to take the guess work out of hiring by identifying employees with the most potential.

Candidates take three assessment tests, which measure the communication, reasoning and problem-solving skills required for most jobs from entry-level to professional. They must earn a minimum score of three to get credentials.

The program also includes online coursework for those who need to build their skills as well as a "Work Habits Certification. The latter shows the job seeker has the right skills and the right attitude.

Fletcher said employers in more than 30 states now recognize the program and use it for hiring and even as a promotional tool. Florida officials did not sign onto the program until a little more than three years ago. But, since then, more than 95,000 people statewide have earned credentials.

Volusia County government is the largest local participant in the program, Fletcher said.

County officials confirmed they use the assessments in hiring applicants for clerical and administrative assistant positions.

Volusia County Schools also offers the credential to students in career and technical programs. Those who take part and pass are entitled to have it noted on their high school diploma. Flagler County schools participated in the program for one year, but have put those efforts on hold.

Besides new hires, Fletcher said, firms also can use the testing software in-house to help employees evaluate and upgrade their skills. "It is multifaceted," she said. Volusia County is a leader in the program and has been successful in getting more businesses to participate. The program is a key component of the state's workforce development strategy and is being promoted as a way to attract and retain businesses in the state. The program is a key component of the state's workforce development strategy and is being promoted as a way to attract and retain businesses in the state.