

# CBI NEWS



## PRIME CHOICE FOODS ORGANIC SNACK FOODS

We're on the web:  
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Contact the Center for  
Business and Industry at  
Virginia Highlands  
Community College for  
**customized training.**

276-739-2548

Jose Gomez developed an interest in the tortilla business early in his career; and had developed plans, leased a building and purchased the needed equipment to start his own manufacturing facility by 1982.

Today he owns the old Terry's Snack Foods facility in Bristol, Virginia, and is busy building his latest venture – Prime Choice Foods (PCF) – into a major manufacturer of organic snack products.

After operating his first business in the early 1980s, Gomez went to work for a larger California tortilla manufacturer and worked his way up the ranks from delivery person to company owner. With that accomplished, he made the daring decision to expand his business to include organic snacks and to begin marketing his product along the East Coast.

In those days Gomez had only two customers – Whole Foods and The B. Manischewitz Co. of New York. "Our growth has been tremendous since that time," he said.

When Gomez received word that the old Terry's facility was going to be sold at auction, he saw the opportunity to further grow his business with a facility close to his customers. He was high bidder for the property and equipment. On Oct. 23, 2000, PCF was established, and operations began about ten months later.

"We have been trying to keep up with the technology in terms of machinery and equipment capital investments," he said, explaining that the company recently invested \$500,000 on seasoning and packaging equipment. Additional cooking facilities for their organic corn products were recently added, and PCF leased the 30,000 square foot warehouse facility formerly used at Sandvik Industrial Park in October 2003.

PCF is a certified, approved manufacturer of corn-based kosher snack foods. The products are all organic, which means the corn products are grown without the use of toxic and persistent pesticides and fertilizers, using a farming process that maintains and replenishes soil fertility. Gomez is currently working with local universities to



develop a relationship with regional farmers. By purchasing organic white, yellow, blue, and red corn from local farmers, PCF will be assisting in the region's agricultural economic development.

Since operations began in Bristol, Gomez has been focusing on training because, he notes, "without training, the system won't work." It is important to know how to operate the packaging machines, corn cooking machines, steepers and ovens. He and his team have been putting in 12 to 13 hours per day in recent months to get things running smoothly. Since January the local production facility has been operating around the clock.

Gomez has organized his workforce with the help of Shannon Blevins of Virginia Business Assistance and the Virginia Employment Commission; Jerry Brown of the Bristol Virginia Economic Development Committee has provided help with the company's physical expansion. Highlands Union Bank has been instrumental in securing financing for new equipment.

The Center for Business and Industry at Virginia Highlands Community College (VHCC) has also provided help by conducting pre-employment testing and evaluation. The company currently has 33 employees but hopes to expand its workforce soon.

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We are looking for people with work skills who can keep up with our changes and innovations in technology," Gomez explained. "So far we have been low key in the Bristol community. I think people think of us as the old Terry's. For us, the new Prime Choice Foods Co. has brought in a lot more potential for growth and job security. Our goal is to eventually get the Terry's name back on the market under an organic product and service the local retailers in the community."

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## VHCC Announces Administrative Professionals Luncheon

Business leaders throughout the region are invited to honor their administrative assistants by treating them to an April 21 luncheon sponsored by the Center for Business and Industry at Virginia Highlands Community College and the VHCC Division of Business, Humanities and Social Sciences.

The event will be held at noon at the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center in Abingdon and will feature guest speaker Dr. Deborah C. Clear, VHCC vice president of Instruction and Student Services. Her remarks will recognize administrative professionals as "Ambassadors of Excellence," which is the theme of the 2004 national celebration.

Dr. Clear came to VHCC in 1972 and served in a variety of roles – from part-time secretary to dean – before being selected to serve as the College's chief academic administrator last year. Much of her career was spent as a classroom teacher of business and secretarial science courses.

The VHCC event coincides with Administrative Professionals Day. The annual celebration was established in 1952 as National Secretaries Day, but the name was changed four years ago to keep pace with the changing job titles and expanding responsibilities of today's administrative workforce.

Tickets for the event are \$15 and must be purchased by April 16. To purchase tickets or receive additional information, contact the Center for Business and Industry at P.O. Box 828, Abingdon, Virginia., 24212-0828 or call (276) 739-2430.

## Technology Updates

Dr. Andrew Cohill of Design Nine, Inc. posts frequent commentary under "News" on his web site ([www.designnine.com](http://www.designnine.com)) about technology trends that will be affecting our region. Information about his "Knowledge Economy Readiness Roadshow" can be found at the bottom right of the home page under "Site news." Following current trends, Dr. Cohill projects that direct manufacturing will provide only 4 – 8 percent of all jobs in the United States by the year 2015. And, by 2018 it is expected that over 50 percent of all goods and services will be bought over the Internet.

## Human Relations Class

Two recent studies about the skills gap for employees in the southwestern Virginia region have identified the "soft skills" as the type of training most needed. Employers listed a positive work ethic and attitude, plus a desire to learn and be trained as characteristics desired for employees. Other traits and skills identified as important by chief executive officers and human resource managers include the following: good attendance, courtesy, self-directed, communication skills, team skills, and adaptability.

These topics and more will be the focus of a new class, "Human Relations and Leadership Development," offered by CBI during the summer 2004 session. The three-credit course, BUS 117-40, will begin with a class meeting on June 1 where the instructor will explain the project format which will use a combination of classroom and independent study. Students will develop portfolios relating to the subjects of teamwork, group dynamics, individual and group motivation techniques, thinking required for leadership, self-development, organization skills, communication, and reaction to change. Students will meet to discuss portfolios and explore results and ideas.

The course will be taught by Randall Roberts. He may be contacted directly at RScottRob@yahoo.com for further clarification about the topics and schedule. For information about VHCC registration and tuition, call Kelley Moore at 276 739-2533.

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## Fire Science Instructor Recognized for Service

James R. Fletcher was awarded a plaque for 50 years of service by the Damascus Volunteer Fire Department at its January Firemen's Banquet. Jim joined the department in July 1954, and has served as Secretary-Treasurer, Lieutenant, Assistant Chief and Training Officer. He became an Adjunct Fire Instructor for the Commonwealth of Virginia in July 1965, and has served as Instructor of the Fire Science program at Virginia Highlands Community College since 1972.

While serving as a fireman, Jim also completed his studies at Emory and Henry College and began teaching at Bethel High School. He became a teacher and coach at Abingdon High School when it opened in 1959. He also completed a Master of Science degree from Radford University and became Assistant Principal at Abingdon High School in 1976. He retired from that position in July 1991, but continued to teach Fire Safety to elementary and middle school students. His favorite title was bestowed by the children of Washington County who cited him as "The Firefighter Who Came to My School." The Virginia Department of Fire Programs named him "Public Education Instructor of the Year" in 1993.

Fortunately, Jim continues to teach courses in the Fire Science Career Studies Certificate program at VHCC. He will be the instructor for FIR 220, "Building Construction," this fall. The course covers fundamentals of building design and materials as applied to fire resistance and special fire resistance features. The class will begin on Tuesday, August 24. For information, call the CBI office at 276 739-2533.



Jim R. Fletcher

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## VHCC Offers AchieveGlobal Leadership Programs

Melinda Leland, Workforce Development Coordinator for the Center for Business and Industry, has completed AchieveGlobal training and is now certified to offer specialized leadership, teamwork, and sales promotion skills to businesses and industries throughout the region.

Formerly known as Zenger Miller, AchieveGlobal partners with educational institutions like VHCC to provide training that allows business and industry to boost productivity. The training modules cover everything from the development of leadership skills to the analysis of work processes. Training is affordable and can be offered company-wide or to a select group of employees. Topics cover Coaching, Giving and Receiving Constructive Feedback, Giving Recognition, Handling Emotions Under Pressure, Making the Most of Team Differences, Building a Collaborative Workplace, Managing Change, Quality: The Leadership Role, and more.

Those interested are invited to contact Melinda Leland at 276-739-2548 to receive a complete list of the offerings and to receive assistance in designing a program to meet their needs.

## CBI's Melinda Leland Gains Professional Certification

Melinda Leland, Workforce Development Coordinator for the Center for Business and Industry, has completed the Workforce Development Professional Competencies Program offered through the University of Virginia.

The extensive program prepares those who design workforce development programs the training and leadership skills needed to provide quality employment and training services to employers and job seekers. By completing the semester-long course, Melinda Leland has gained professional certification, helping VHCC to reach a statewide goal established by Virginia Community College Chancellor Glenn DuBois.

The course focused on emerging issues in workforce education and included training in strategic planning, leadership, business and economic development, environmental scanning, organizational assessment, instructional design and program management.

The Center for Business and Industry at Virginia Highlands Community College provides companies in the region with skilled instructors experienced in the unique needs of the workplace and of the adult learner. Training programs – which range from CPR to advanced computer skills -- are designed with the needs of the company in mind and delivered on campus or at the business location.

*Contact  
the  
Center for  
Business  
and  
Industry at  
(276) 739-2430  
for class  
information  
or  
visit our web site  
at  
[www.vhcc.edu/cbi](http://www.vhcc.edu/cbi).*

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**Managing Problem Employees**-Learn techniques for turning around bad attitudes, the right and wrong way to terminate, an effective tactic to slash absenteeism, how to protect yourself from employee lawsuits, sure-fire ways to quickly boost morale, and strategies for winning employment compensation claims. Offered on August 2 from 9:00 a.m.—3:30 p.m. Cost: \$169.00

**How To Get People To Pay**-Learn to dramatically improve your success rate in getting net 30 customers, who normally pay in 90 days, to pay faster. Master incredibly effective ways to collect checks and gain powerful telephone techniques that will get results with your first collection call. Offered on August 3 from 9:00 a.m.—3:30 p.m. Cost: \$149.00

**Spanish In The Workplace**-An introduction to basic Spanish for situations encountered in the workplace. Sessions will be interactive and participatory using the Spanish language through group activities and discussion. This is an excellent program to improve communication, teamwork, and productivity with Latino employees. Offered on Mondays, Sept. 6 through Sept. 27 from 5:30—8:30 p.m. Cost: \$125 (includes text)

**Human Resources Certification Exam Preparation**-This program is recommended for professionals who plan to take the PHR and SPHR exams, those with increased responsibilities who would like to take a broad-based refresher, those who are returning to the profession, and human resources professionals interested in upgrading their certification to a senior level. Topics covered include strategic management; workforce planning and employment; human resource development; compensation and benefits; employee and labor relations; and occupational health, safety and security. Offered on Thursdays, Oct. 7 through Nov. 11 from 5:30-9:30 p.m. Cost:\$1095 (includes SHRM materials)

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## TRAINING AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

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