

Muskegor

# State of education: Access, quality key for business success



Educators and business people talk about the state of education at the October Business for Breakfast event organized by the Muskegon Lakeshore Chamber of Commerce at the Holiday Inn hotel downtown Muskegon. Picture (L-R): Dale Nesbary, president of Muskegon Community College; Lee Coggin, president of Baker College; Kyle Fiebig, principal of Muskegon Area Career Tech Center; and Steve Olsen, of Northern Michigan Tool. (Justine McGuire / MLive)



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on October 31, 2016 at 4:12 PM

MUSKEGON, MI – Attendees at this month's Business for Breakfast event had an appetite for education.

Education as the key to business success in the Muskegon community was the theme at the October Muskegon Lakeshore Chamber of Commerce Business for Breakfast at the Holiday Inn.

"We've been very fortunate to have Muskegon Community College, our Career Tech Center and Baker College in our community," said Steve Olsen, of Northern Machine Tool, who moderated the education panel discussion. "I think about the size of our community and the post-high school educational opportunities that our students have – we're very, very fortunate. Not only our company, but every business in Muskegon County."

The panelists agreed that they're working to make students ready for careers, hopefully in Muskegon County.

About 75 percent of Baker College students work in Kent, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana or Ottawa counties after graduation, said Lee Coggin, college president. About 6 percent move out of Michigan.

"We're working for you," said Muskegon Community College President Dale Nesbary. "The work we do is so that you have the talent."

The goal at the Career Tech Center is to build intentional futures for students, said Kyle Fiebig, tech center principal.

A run down of each of the institutions was followed by a question and answer session.

**OLSEN: Have college costs been a barrier for students? If so, how will the Muskegon Area Promise impact this?**

**COGGIN:** "Cost can certainly be a barrier. We'll probably next fall start to see the real impact (of the Muskegon Area Promise Scholarship).

"When we talk about the cost, I think there are some things that get lost in that conversation are value. We should spend more time talking about value, as well as other barriers to completion.

"We also need to talk about the return on investment. For less than the cost of buying a new Chevy pick up truck, you can get a bachelor's degree from Baker College.

"Don't let all of the noise about cost and debt drown out the fact that most of the students that don't complete are facing other challenges."

**OLSEN: What do you do as an institution to encourage your students to stay in the community?**

**FIEBIG:** "You as community have the opportunity to come in and interview our young people. You can even interview our adult learners. If you want, you can even hire them on the spot and keep them and let them know what's happening right here. To me, that's one of the best models for them to truly see."

**COGGIN:** "We use a tool called Handshake that allows employers to post any job openings they have. We host three career expos a year. ... I talk to a lot of employers, and say even if you're not going to be hiring in the next three, four, five months, you ought to be there. You never know what your needs are going to be. It's a great opportunity to connect with the talent base."

**NESBARY:** "We're deeply involved, all of us, in bringing businesses into our doors and sending our students out into the business world before they leave with a degree or a certificate. That's important."

The chamber will take a break from Business for Breakfast during November, and instead host its annual Holiday Kick-off Party from 5-7 p.m. on Wednesday, Nov. 30, at Verdoni's Event Center, 211 Seminole Road in Norton Shores.

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