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## Opinion-Editorial *New Year New Opportunities*

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*Charlotte (Charlie) Mahoney, Chair  
Michigan Works! Association Board of Directors  
Southeast Michigan Community Alliance (SEMCA) Michigan Works!*

*Christine Quinn  
Chairperson, Michigan Works! Association Directors' Council  
President, South Central Michigan Works!*

When reading the recent article in *Bridge* about both perceptions and realities regarding our state's workforce development efforts, I remembered advice the 19<sup>th</sup> century abolitionist Henry Ward Beecher once offered his colleagues, "hold yourself responsible for a higher standard than anyone else expects of you. Never excuse yourself." On behalf of the member agencies of the Michigan Works! Association working in communities across Michigan, I make no excuses. Michigan's economy is in transition. Our Michigan Works! System must transition as well, and is with a pledge to hold our work to the highest standard for the people looking to hire, the people looking for work and the people paying the bills.

Over recent years, the local member agencies of the Michigan Works! Association have set out to significantly and substantially refocus our model. As comments in the *Bridge* article show, today, Michigan Works! is focusing on meeting the needs of Michigan job makers, not simply on the job applicant. It is an approach that Governor Rick Snyder calls a "demand-driven employment strategy;" one that trains and places workers in growing and important sectors like manufacturing, energy, healthcare, information technology and agriculture. Our dramatic change of course in recent years is what the Governor recognized when he cited the strength and importance of Michigan Works! last month during his major policy address on workforce development.

We are proactively training, educating and preparing job hunters for the jobs of tomorrow—the type of jobs that are in demand here in Michigan.

And, we are seeing successes across the state. As part of the national Workforce Investment Act, Michigan Works! is working every day to retrain displaced workers and connect them with those in-demand jobs. Our agencies successfully place 94.9 percent of those workers in a new job, by far the highest rate in the nation and dramatically outpacing the national average of 74.8 percent. Similarly, we scored a top-of-the-class 95 percent satisfaction rating from employers – job makers – using Michigan Works! to identify and hire new workers under the program.

We are leaner, more efficient and more effective than ever. Despite impressions left by the *Bridge* article, Michigan Works! is and always has been subject to intense state monitoring and fiscal oversight three times each year, strict annual federal monitoring under the Workforce Investment Act and actively monitors the programs and fiscal responsibilities of all subcontractors to ensure they are in compliance with federal and state regulations.

The transformation is far from complete, but we've started to see results in the form of filled high-skill job openings and changed lives. Over the last year local agencies worked with high-tech manufacturers, hospitals and care centers from Grand Rapids to Saginaw, Escanaba to St. Joseph and everywhere in between to fill vacant, highly-educated engineer, high-skill nurse, nurse's aide, pharmacist, lab technician and prosthetic technician positions among others.

The Michigan Works! mission was to fill the need of a job maker with a high-skill opening by identifying potential employees, training them, equipping them and partnering with them throughout the education process before placing them in their new career.

As Michigan and Michigan Works! continue to transition economically, I will be the last to offer excuses. I will also be the first to acknowledge our work is an important tool for job makers and job seekers and that our work isn't done.

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