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If You Don't Have New Skill, Get One

HIGH unemployment in most states and indications that few companies plan to expand work forces this winter emphasize again the importance of training people for doing better work or for new careers.

It is true that some well qualified individuals are out of work, but for years statistics have shown that unemployment comes first and in larger numbers for untrained youngsters and for adults who have no marketable skills or who have learned only one trade.

Oklahoma's extensive vocational education system may be a major factor in the comparatively lower number of unemployed here. There are 24 area vo-tech schools designed to qualify students for something more than manual labor, plus nine manpower skills centers, plus the OSU vocational education branches.

In a just-published book titled "Programs for People," Roy P. Stewart, executive director of the Oklahoma Advisory Council on Vocational Education, ably reviews development of this system over the

past 60 years. He was assisted by Pendleton Woods and Melodee Wallace.

Publicized achievements of vocational agriculture students in competitive events have made this activity better known but other sectors are succeeding, too. These include law enforcement, meat processing, careers for women, oil field skills, operation of heavy equipment and trucks, health services, aeromechanics, electronics, graphics, hotel management, business management, industrial production, and others.

"Dr. Francis Tuttle, state director of vocational education should be more 'pushy' and active rather than reactive to the needs of the communities and states," Stewart writes. "Skill proficiency is paramount."

An article by Glenn Bayless in The Sunday Oklahoman recently declared that Oklahoma ingenuity is going to be tested in the coming year to create the kinds of jobs that will replace traditional manufacturing and production jobs eroded by the recession.

Estal Hart, director of the industry division of the Oklahoma Economic Development Department, was quoted as saying that a move into micro-electronics production would give the state its best chance of making new jobs.

This coincides with recommendations of the state vo-tech advisory council, which said:

"Our state must show a capability to produce technicians. We have gained in the past by having people who had manual dexterity, were receptive to new skill training, and were producers with excellent personal work attitudes. Now, we will need all of those desirable qualifications, along with specialized training to participate in the technological revolution."

Thousands of Oklahomans are now employed at jobs which did not exist 10 or 20 years ago. We may expect many additional jobs or careers to be "invented" in the years ahead.

The message is clear: If you don't have an up-to-date skill, get one. Your present job might become obsolete before you retire.