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From LPN to Registered Nurse: SIONI addresses the need for qualified nurses and paves the road to success!

Marion, Illinois (May 14, 2012) – The healthcare industry is in need of registered nurses across the nation. Southern Illinois is no different. Community colleges in the 20-county Connect SI region have recognized this need. A total of 3 area colleges have banded together, with support from the Connect SI Foundation, to offer the *Southern Illinois Online Nursing Initiative (SIONI)* – a part-time hybrid-online program, requiring on-site clinical training, that delivers an excellent nursing education for qualified Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) from the region.

About SIONI

A centerpiece of the region's "Grow Your Own" strategy, the SIONI program was designed to help working LPNs advance their education to become registered nurses (RNs). In addition to educational development, SIONI also provides a way for working graduates of the program to remain in local jobs rather than migrate to out-of-state employers – which has been an issue with the traditional classroom program.

SIONI not only addresses the needs of Southern Illinois and its qualifying workers, but also recognizes the benefits of SIONI and employer partnerships. Community colleges in collaboration with Local Workforce Investment Act (LWIA) providers have been reaching out to local healthcare providers to identify working LPNs who would like to participate in this initiative.

Many healthcare-related employers commonly aid their nurses in furthering their educational goals. LWIA providers have also been negotiating agreements with local healthcare providers to pay a significant portion of their staff's training costs through incumbent worker training programs. The incumbent worker programs offer employers matching funds to lower the cost of providing education to their employees, which results in higher skilled and more valuable employees.

SIONI Graduate Celebrates Her Success

Donna Mack, 51, knew that she wanted to work as a medical professional since high school. Donna initially studied to become a paramedic at the College of DuPage and then achieved her degree as a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) at Triton College in Glen Ellyn, Illinois. She worked first as a Paramedic, then as an LPN assisting with organ kidney transplants. Donna found that she loved taking care of patients. She has been assisting patients with dialysis care at Fresenius Medical Care in Harrisburg, Illinois since 1997.

(Continued on next page)

Donna Mack, Registered Nurse and December 2011 SIONI graduate, currently works with dialysis patients at Fresenius Medical Care in Harrisburg, Illinois.



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(Page 2 of 2)

Donna wanted to become a Registered Nurse (RN), but was unable to return to school and continue to work. Since she had to keep her current job, Donna needed to find a flexible training schedule. *“There was no other way I would be able to finish my degree,”* Donna explained. She heard about the SIONI program from a friend. SIONI seemed like a perfect solution – enabling Donna to work toward becoming a Registered Nurse and also keep her job as an LPN.

The 1-year program was very intense. With 3 exams per module and clinical training on Saturdays, Donna had much to learn in a condensed time period. However, with discipline and dedication, Donna successfully graduated from the SIONI program in December 2011, and is now a Registered Nurse. SIONI was a valuable learning experience according to Donna – helping to advance her career, plus allowing her to do more in her current job.

Donna would recommend the SIONI program to other working LPNs wanting to become RNs. *“I loved the flexibility of the SIONI program. It was the only way that I could further my education. I really enjoyed participating in the program at Shawnee College, where instructors were more open to the online aspect of the program,”* Donna stated. *“College can be outrageously expensive. We need to do things a little differently, and have different avenues available for education,”* she added.

Donna’s advice to working LPNs considering the program, *“Be very committed... realize what your time constraints are and be flexible with them. You have to be disciplined and a self-motivator. You can’t procrastinate. I’ve spent more time studying in one year than I did in the traditional classroom experience!”*

Donna plans to earn her BSN degree and is currently taking general courses at Southeastern Illinois College and Mc Kendree University. She lives in Equality, Illinois with her husband and two children, ages 8 and 14.

How to Apply

The SIONI program is currently offered at Rend Lake College, Shawnee Community College, and Southeastern Illinois College. To participate, general education courses must be completed before beginning the SIONI program. Laptops are provided to students for the duration of the program. Anyone interested in applying for the SIONI program should contact the nursing department at their home campus for specific entrance requirements.

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The Connect SI Foundation supports a collaborative, regional economic strategy for the southernmost 20 counties of Illinois. Our initiatives are built upon broadband connectivity, with the concept that our dispersed assets can be combined to make our region a driving force in the world economy. Additional information may be found on our website at www.connectsi.us. Equal Opportunity/Employer Program. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request for individuals with disabilities.