

# PACRO loan program works to help train plant workers

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The Paducah Area Community Reuse Organization and Paducah Bank have established a loan program to help train workers for much-needed positions at the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant.

The program is designed to assist participants in West Kentucky Community & Technical College's 12-week course to become certified radiation technicians, or "rad techs," to fill positions with U.S. Department of Energy contractors involved in the cleanup at the plant site.

Scott Darnell, president/CEO of Paducah Economic Development, which oversees PACRO, said of the 22 students enrolled in the program, only four were eligible for assistance under the U.S. Department of Labor's \$4.5 million workforce training grant because of eligibility requirements they be "displaced workers."

"We talked about the need for some type of revolving loan program and have partnered with Paducah Bank, where they will do all the screening," Darnell said during Wednesday's PACRO board meeting. "The loans are for \$3,000 and we would secure the loans with a liquid CD, and the underwriting criteria would be in place to reduce the risk."

Of 12 people who expressed an interest in the program, "six decided to take advantage of that, so there's a total of \$18,000," Darnell said.

"Paducah Bank did a phenomenal job. It's worked well," he said. "We'll be putting the paperwork together and depositing the \$18,000, and that money will be returned when it is repaid by the participants in the next 24 months."

The board authorized up to \$50,000 for the program during its last meeting.

"(The program) is designed well," Darnell said. "I think it will be a great model we can replicate for other areas in the region going forward."

Jim Pape, WKCTC vice president of workforce and economic development, said the program came about because Fluor Federal Services, the DOE's chief cleanup contractor, as well as other contractors at the site, needed 50 to 75 trained radiation technicians right away.

The technicians are involved in the monitoring of radiation and duties related to radiation safety at the site.

"We have 22 students and class is going well," Pape said. "The class will continue through July and August and conclude after Labor Day."

At the completion of the course, participants will be ready to take the DOE core exam to be available for employment as radiation technicians. Jobs start at about \$35 an hour, Pape said.

"We already have a waiting list for the next class. The people who will be in the next class will be notified by the end of this month," Pape said.