



Tobacco workers who lost their jobs when Philip Morris closed its Concord plant in July and others affected by changes in the tobacco industry can receive assistance through Project Skill-UP at Rowan-Cabarrus Community College, according to college officials.

RCCC's R3 Center is using a \$60,000 grant from the N.C. Tobacco Trust Fund Commission to provide career assistance to tobacco workers, their family members and local businesses affected by the changes in the tobacco industry, according to Jeff Lowrance, RCCC's community relations director.

The N.C. General Assembly created the N.C. Tobacco Trust Fund Commission in 2000 to help reduce the impact of declining tobacco production on workers, including farmers and others employees.

Jeff Jennings, of the N.C. Tobacco Trust Fund, addressed the RCCC Board of Trustees on Monday during a presentation about the Project Skill-UP activities.

The college is currently recruiting former tobacco workers for the Skill-UP program, which is designed to provide education and training for former tobacco workers. The program offers career exploration activities and job placement, as well as programs to help folks earn educational credentials.

Philip Morris ended production on July 29, after manufacturing cigarettes for about 27 years at the plant on U.S. 29 in Concord.

About 1,000 workers lost their jobs when the plant closed.

Workers expressed mixed emotions on their last day of work in July. Some planned to retire, while others started the journey to figure out what to do with their lives.

Philip Morris USA officials said 565 employees from the Concord plant accepted transfers to Richmond. Altria had about 2,300 employees at its Richmond cigarette plant in early 2009.

In April, Philip Morris USA announced it planned to speed up the closing of the Concord plant, ending production in late July. The cigarette manufacturing industry has experienced declining sales over the last several decades, company officials said, citing low cigarette volumes and increased taxes on tobacco products as the reason for closing the Concord plant early.

About 100 workers will continue to work at the plant through the end of the year to help decommission the equipment.

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