

Executive Summary

On February 9, 1996, Advance Transformer officials notified all employees and local officials of the intent to permanently close their Platteville facility. Over the course of the next 18 months, 620 Platteville Advance Transformer employees were laid off.

Platteville Advance Transformer

- 1977 – 1996
- Located in Platteville, a community of 10,000
- One of Grant County's (49,600 pop.) largest employers
- Excellent salary and benefit package

Figure 1: Advance Transformer

Approximately ten years after the beginning of the layoffs, Southwest Wisconsin Technical College (Southwest Tech) partnered with Job Service and the Department of Workforce Development and conducted a study in which the impact of training and services on the employees involved in this plant closure was studied. The parameters of the study were

determined by a committee that was formed with personnel from agencies also involved in the Employment Response Team (ERT) that was formed at the time of the plant closure announcement. It was the intent of Southwest Tech that the committee focus on tracking approximately 620 laid-off workers.

Southwest Wisconsin Technical College felt it was an opportune time to conduct this study since laid-off employees had sufficient time to complete educational training and rejoin the workforce. Another benefit of conducting the 2006 survey was that many of the service agency employees who supported affected Advance Transformer employees were still available to work on this project.

SWTC, along with partner agencies, conducted a follow-up survey ten years later to determine:

- Impact of education
- Evaluation of assistance provided by support agencies
- Benefit of partnership between service agencies
- Return on investment of services provided
- Impact on quality of life
- Migration pattern
- Overall community impact

Figure 2: Follow-up Survey

Survey Information

A total of 620 surveys were mailed to former Platteville Advance Transformer employees. Fifty-three surveys were returned undeliverable. For the purposes of this report a total of 567 surveys were delivered. Three hundred and five (305) surveys were returned for a response rate of 53.8 percent. Not every person answered every question, which resulted in some inconsistent numbers between questions. In general, the respondents put much thought and care into their responses. They

Survey was conducted between February 9, 2006, and June 30, 2006

Surveys delivered	567
Survey responses	305
53.8% Response Rate	

Figure 3: Survey Conducted

were very willing and wanted to talk about their experiences and feelings at the time of the plant closing and during their re-adjustment period. Their sincerity and commitment in telling their story is documented in the 41 pages of data and comments provided by the survey respondents. Readers of this report are encouraged to take the time to review the entire survey results found in the appendix of the full study. [\(Add a link to website\)](#)

The surveys were first totaled as an aggregate. The aggregate survey results are included in Appendix C of the full report. In order to accomplish one of the intents of this study, which was to assess the impact of short-term training and one- or two-year technical education versus no further education for the laid-off employees of Platteville Advance Transformer, the survey was also tallied in three sub-categories.

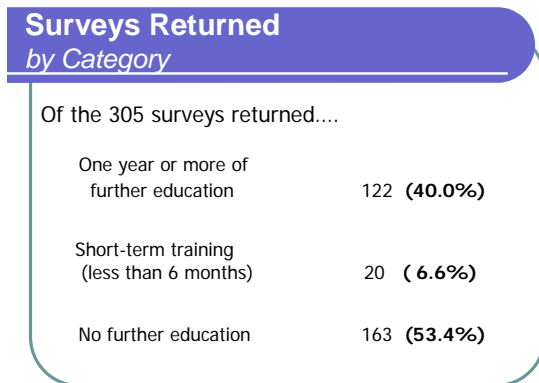


Figure 4: Surveys Returned

For questions not pertaining to educational attainment, the tables or comments are included in total. These questions pertain more to another intent of the study, which was to evaluate the assistance and services provided by support agencies.

Company Information

Advance Transformer opened their doors in Platteville in 1977. The company was considered an excellent employer with respect to wages and benefits. They were also considered an excellent community partner. The factory manufactured ballasts used in the lighting industry. Employees at the plant were semi-skilled workers who preferred to stay in the rural area. The average wage in 1995 was \$8.80 per hour and the average longevity of workers at the plant was 11 years. Seventy-seven percent (77%) of the workforce had a high school diploma and the majority of workers were female.

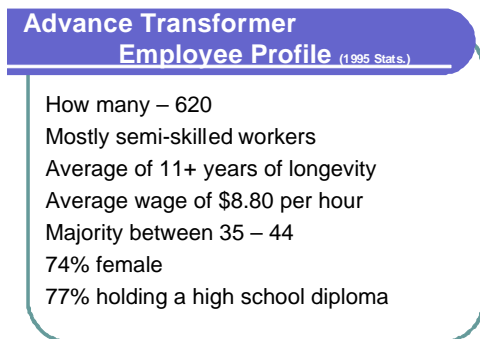


Figure 5: Employee Profile

It is important to note that Advance Transformer in Platteville was one of the largest employers in a community of less than 10,000 people. Six hundred twenty (620) jobs were very significant to the community. The impact of the plant closure extended far beyond the immediate people being laid-off. The ripple affect to other business such as retail stores, movie theaters, and restaurants was felt immediately.

Key Findings on Dislocated Workers

As part of the survey, respondents were asked to compare their current job to their job of ten years ago at Advance Transformer. In all categories employees were asked to indicate if their current job circumstances were better, the same, or not as good as their job at Advance. Areas of comparison were in wages, benefits, working conditions, hours, commute, advancement opportunity and job satisfaction. In all seven areas the “better” category was scored the highest by the participants who went on to one year or more of further education. The percent difference between this group and the no further education group appears to be significant. Figures 6 – 9 represent a sampling of some of the seven areas.

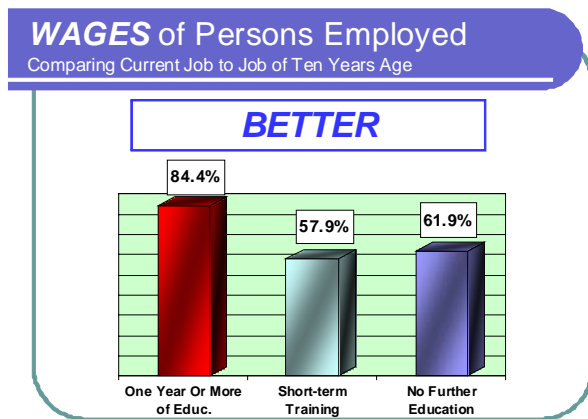


Figure 6: Wages of Persons Employed

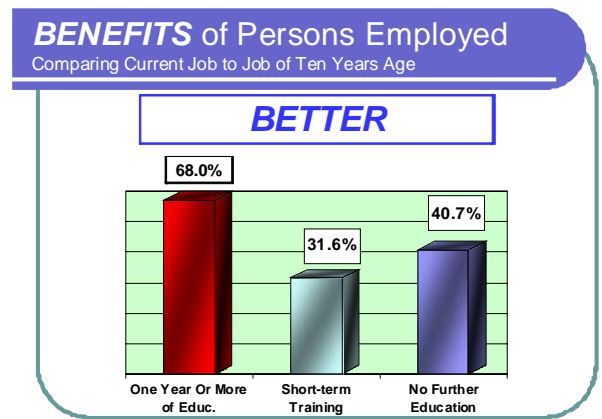


Figure 7: Benefits of Persons Employed

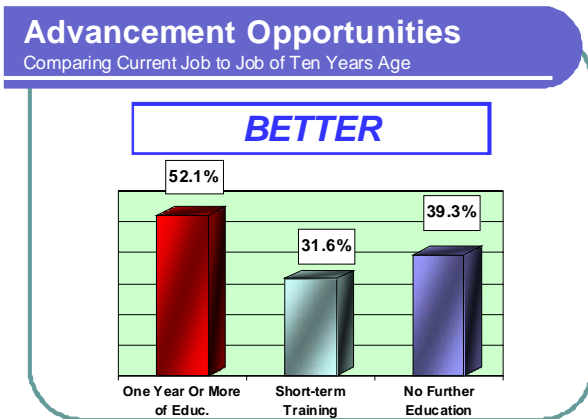


Figure 8: Advancement Opportunities



Figure 9: Job Satisfaction

Participants were asked to compare their current quality of life to life ten years ago while employees of Advance Transformer. The results in the quality of life issues continue to show the impact education has on people. In this question the respondents were asked to compare their quality of life in the areas of family time, leisure time, mental

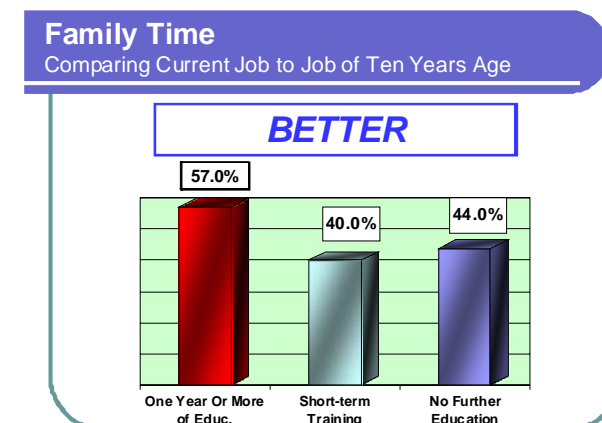


Figure 10: Family Time

health, physical health, standard of living/economic well-being, stress level, and happiness. Again participants were asked to indicate if their current quality of life was better, the same, or not as good as their quality of life while employed at Advance. In all seven areas the “better” category was scored the highest by the participants who went on to one year or more of further education. Again, the percent difference between this group and the no further education group appears to be significant. Figures 10 – 12 represent a sampling of some of the seven areas.

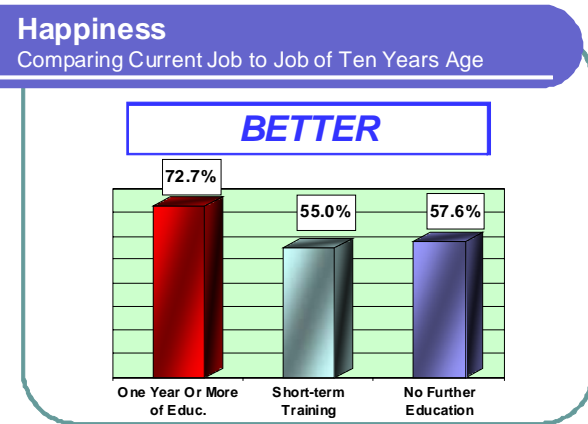


Figure 11: Happiness

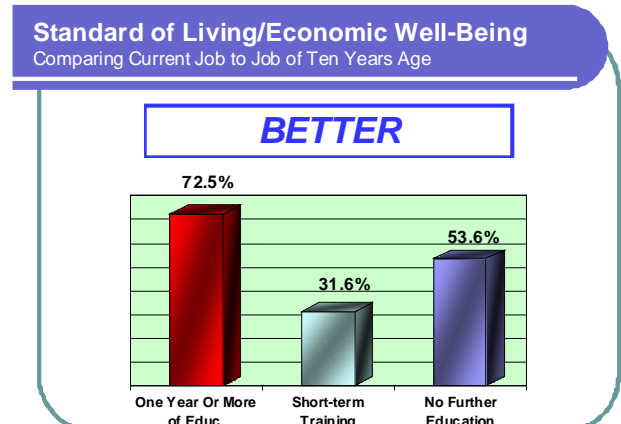


Figure 12: Standard of Living/Econ. Well-Being

The following are additional findings from the Dislocated Worker feedback:

- 92.3 percent of survey respondents reported still living at the same address (45.8%) or moved but stayed within 50 miles (46.5%) of the address they lived at when they worked at Platteville Advance Transformer. Only 7.7% moved 50+ miles away.
- Once participants leave southwest Wisconsin interest in returning declines.

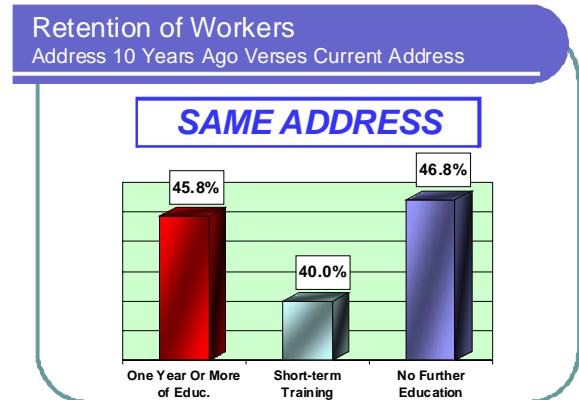


Figure 13: Retention of Workers-Same Address

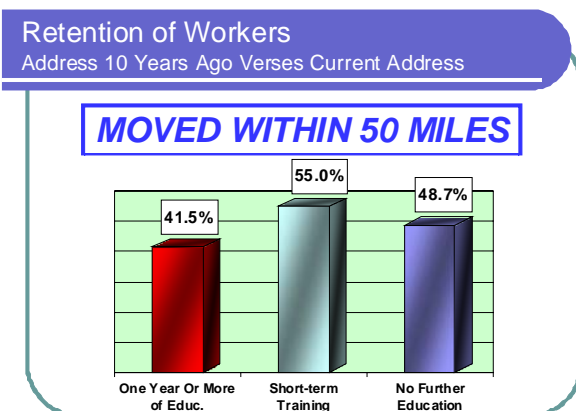


Figure 14: Retention of Workers-Within 50 Miles

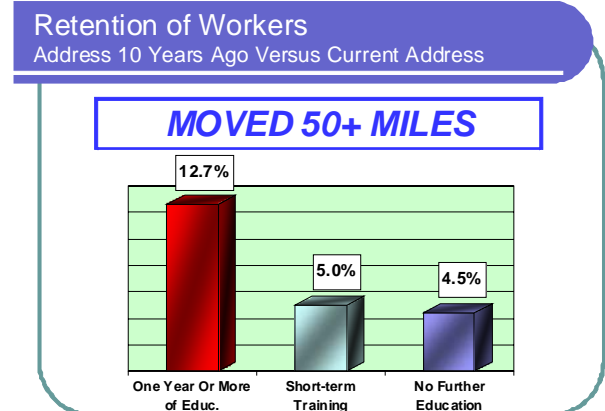


Figure 15: Retention of Workers-50+ Miles

- Individuals who participated in *one year or more of education* had a larger proportion of the group move into salaried positions.
- Participants with *one year or more of education* earned higher wages than those with short-term or no further education.

Wages of Persons Employed Ten Years Later

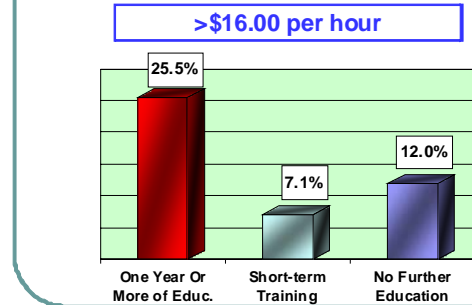


Figure 16: Wages->\$16.00 per hour

Wages of Persons Employed Ten Years Later

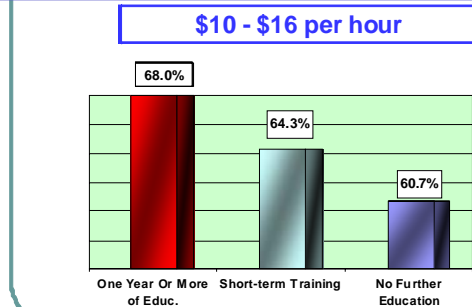


Figure 17: Wages-\$10-\$16 per hour

Wages of Persons Employed Ten Years Later

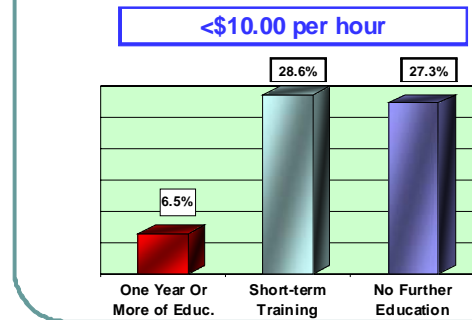


Figure 18: Wages-<\$10.00 per hour

- Additional *education at the one year or more* level increased participant's advancement opportunities.
- *One year or more of further education* provided a broader range of opportunities for participants than those with *short-term training* or *no further education*.
- Services utilized by the most participants were education, mileage reimbursement, extended unemployment coverage and job search assistance.
- Participants felt positive about the services they received, especially the helpfulness of staff.
- The main reason for not utilizing services was that workers had already secured other employment.
- Laid-off workers who indicated they wanted to attend an educational program but didn't, stated that health insurance was vital so they had to get another job with benefits.
- The majority of participants that sought further education attended a technical college.
- A majority of educational participants selected programs in business, health, or industrial occupations; at the time the survey was completed 65.3 percent of respondents were employed in a job related to their training.

- Short-term training does not provide evidence of increased salary and benefits; however, we feel short-term training did lead respondents to enroll in one- or two-year programs. It is our opinion that short-term training provided an “on ramp” to further education in this instance but as a stand-alone did not prove valuable.
- Participants in *one year or more of education* fared better than participants in *short-term training* and *no further education* in all categories when comparing their present job to their Advance Transformer job. Those categories included wages, benefits, working conditions, hours, commute, advancement opportunity and job satisfaction.
- Participants in *one year or more of education* fared better than participants in *short-term training* and those with *no further education* in all categories when comparing their quality of life to ten years ago. Those categories included family time, leisure time, mental health, physical health, standard of living, stress level and happiness.
- At layoff nearly 76 percent of the workers were between the ages of 25 and 44 and therefore would have many more years to participate in the labor market.
- With the plant closing, individuals were provided an awareness of incentives in the following areas:
 - Opportunity for career exploration
 - Opportunity for self-assessment
 - Opportunity to receive personal counseling
 - Opportunities to meet with a variety of professional specialists
 - Opportunities to develop new career skills

Key Findings for Employment Response Team (ERT)

- Involve public officials
- Organize to avoid panic
- Get financial assistance quickly
- Get all commitments/promises in writing
- Communicate, Communicate, Communicate
- Involve all partners and agencies in the service area as well as state agencies
- Appoint a lead (may be individual or agency)
- Develop an ERT Plan
- Meet bi-weekly or as needed to coordinate activities and share information; inform public regularly through press releases, etc.
- Form subcommittees to work on specific areas such as training, individual assistance and marketing
- Develop timeline and monitor progress
- Don't forget the “Human Factor”

Employment Response Team (ERT)

29 partners identified services and service gaps (see page 43 of full report for complete list)

Three subcommittees formed

- Training
- Individual Assistance
- Marketing

Figure 19: Employment Response Team

[The Human Side of the Advance Transformer Project](#)

The survey contained 28 questions with question 28 an open-ended question that asked respondents “In your own words, how does your life compare to your life ten years ago?” Seventeen pages of single-spaced comments were submitted in response to that single question. In reading their comments, it is fair to say that the majority of the respondents felt an overwhelming sense of loss and fear when the announcement came that the plant was closing.

The authors of this study highly encourage state and agency representatives to read the comments from the 305 survey respondents. If you have ever asked yourself whether your agency, your job, or state money makes a difference in this type of situation, we encourage you to read the responses in the full report. You do make a difference. The money to fund programs for dislocated workers makes a difference. The adage of “Education does not cost – it pays” can be supported by this study. Please note a sampling of comments submitted from dislocated workers as part of the survey.

Comments from Survey Respondents:

- *All the services I received were great. If I did not have these services, I would not be where I am today. I would have never been able to take advantage of 2 years of school if it was not for the Unemployment/Extended Unemployment, my husband would have requested me to quit school and find a job with insurance. No matter the hourly pay. I have always been the person that has supplied my family with Health and Dental Insurance.*
- *I think everybody did a great job coming together and letting us know what was available to us. SWTC and the Job Center were a great help. We got a second chance at school and I'm very glad we did!*
- *I was anxious about losing my job at Advance, but I soon realized that the plant closing was my opportunity to receive schooling, succeed in school and go on to do a job where I received personal satisfaction and could be challenged mentally, not just physically.*
- *Funding for school along with unemployment and child care. It was a total change for my life - a second chance - an opportunity I'll always remember.*
- *I feel all the services that I received were all helpful. All the services kept me motivated to accomplish something.*
- *The dislocated worker program was really helpful. Southwest Tech was helpful in my training. I would never had made it without unemployment and extended unemployment and mileage reimbursement.*
- *Job Center employees were very helpful and did follow-ups after I was employed to make sure everything was going good!*
- *The people at the Job Center made a very overwhelming situation change to looking forward to the future and having a better job.*

SPECIAL THANKS

Committee: Appreciation is extended to the following individuals who served on the committee and to their agencies/businesses that fully supported their participation in committee meetings and work. Members included:

Ellen Leuck, Southwest Wisconsin Technical College
Karen Campbell, Southwest Wisconsin Technical College
Bruce Palzkill, Job Service
Annette Nekola, Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development
Kari Oates, Job Service (formerly a Southwest Wisconsin Private Industry Council employee)
Bev Loy, Southwest Wisconsin Workforce Development Board
Lois Knoble, Retired Job Service
James Schneider, Former Grant County Economic Development Corporation
Sheila Marten, Southwest Wisconsin Technical College Job Center
Ron Brisbois, Grant County Economic Development Corporation
Kathy Cushman, Former employee of Platteville Advance Transformer

A special thank you to Dr. Karen R. Knox, President of Southwest Wisconsin Technical College for her vision, commitment, and assistance with this project.

Funding Source: Funding in the amount of \$9,950 for this project was received from the Governor's Council on Workforce Investment. Southwest Wisconsin Technical College was the lead agency and grant holder for this project. Sincere thanks are expressed to the Governor's Council on Workforce Investment for this funding. This report would not have been produced without their financial support. A data sharing agreement that addressed confidentiality protection for program participants was developed between DWD-DWS and Southwest Wisconsin Technical College. Confidentiality of information supplied by former Platteville Advance Transformer employees was maintained throughout this study.

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