

# ST. LOUIS COMMERCE Magazine

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## WORKFORCE



### Charting a Path

Interactive web tool eases obstacles for employers who offer work-site learning opportunities, encourages workforce development efforts.

By Susan Caba

Linda Faulkner cultivates “homegrown” nurses. A recruitment supervisor at St. John’s Mercy Medical Center, she nurtures students from high school on up who are interested in nursing careers, moving them through a series of ever-more skilled, hands-on jobs at the hospital. Faulkner’s hope is that those who do wind up as nurses — or other healthcare professionals in short supply — will join St. John’s roster.

“Tracking students is integral to what we want to do,” says Faulkner, student Flex Team supervisor at St. John’s. “By the time they graduate from nursing school, I’m hoping we’ve already hired them.”



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**Above:** Tamara Flores, checking her schedule with Student Flex Team Supervisor Linda Faulkner, found an entry level job at St. John's Mercy Medical Center using the PathFinder database. Flores, a senior at Highland High School, hopes to become a pediatric emergency physician. This is her first paid position in the healthcare field.

In late February, the hospital provided a new tool for recruiting and monitoring budding nurses by joining a non-profit, centralized database called PathFinder. By early March, Faulkner and Kim Prescott, St. John's manager of Recruitment and Education, had matched three PathFinder students with opportunities. And she was talking enthusiastically about posting the availability of hospital representatives as job fair speakers, student mentors and advisors to career counselors, as well as listing entry level positions.

PathFinder is a regional web-based system for matching students with employers who offer career-oriented learning opportunities. That description hardly does justice to the program's wide-ranging features or its user-friendly simplicity. For students at PathFinder-affiliated schools or youth organizations, the system is one-stop shopping for those interested in workforce development, whether the career in question is professional, technical, or craft-based.



**Above:** PathFinder is a regional web-based system for matching students with employers who offer career-oriented learning opportunities.

For students it offers a catalog of learning opportunities — internships, job-shadowing prospects, apprenticeships, mentoring programs — along with profiles of local employers. Linked websites help them figure out what a career demands in skills and education, while the PathFinder planner helps track their progress in meeting those requirements. As they work, they are building on-line resumes and portfolios.

What's in it for employers? PathFinder takes the hassle out of participating in career fairs and classroom simulations, and minimizes time and money spent sorting through applications and answering telephone inquiries for available positions. Businesses get streamlined access to a pool of entry-level workers, with the ability to monitor a particular person's progress over time. There's no fee for businesses, agencies or institutions.

"It's especially good for businesses that would like to do something, but don't really have the resources," says James F. Duane, assistant director of the Regional Center for Education and Work (RCEW) at the University of Missouri—St. Louis, home base for PathFinder. "There are a lot of ways to get involved. You don't have to do them all."

"Many, many companies are interested in offering opportunities, but they're afraid of being overwhelmed by phone calls," says Rosanne Vrugman, the PathFinder coordinator at RCEW. "With PathFinder, all they have to deal with is one phone call from a central source."

The program reflects the philosophy that high school students should graduate with either job skills or a clear vision of what further education and experience they need. PathFinder is a propriety program licensed by VisionLink. In St. Louis, PathFinder is an initiative of the RCEW in partnership with, among others, the St. Louis RCGA.

For employers, PathFinder's real value is its one-point-of-contact feature. They can browse the resumes of students (identified by number, not name) throughout the St. Louis region, winnowing the resumes electronically to select just those that are appropriate. Students sift through posted opportunities to find positions in their fields.

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When either side finds something of interest, the staff at PathFinder coordinates the process of putting the two parties in touch.

“You’re extending your reach into the community,” says Vrugtman, “without over-extending your resources.” For more information, call Vrugtman or Duane at 314/516-4378, e-mail them at [rcew@umsl.edu](mailto:rcew@umsl.edu) or log on to the PathFinder website, [stlpathfinder.communityos.org](http://stlpathfinder.communityos.org).

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