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WOSU 820 AM News

Columbus hosts language summit

Alaina Busch, WOSU News

COLUMBUS, OH (2007-07-03) Brant Carius of the lawn product company Scotts says it is difficult to find employees who speak foreign languages.

"The old ad in the newspaper just doesn't get it done any longer," he said. "We have to be very creative and think outside the box of how we go after recruiting bilingual people."

Carius says it's essential to find business savvy employees with language skills to blend in with the culture and needs of Scotts. He says this having multilingual employees saves the cost of hiring translators and interpreters outside the company.

"The people we bring in, the interpreters, they don't know our company culture," he said. "They don't know our cultural attributes."

Business and Civic Leaders at Thursday's Ohio Language Summit expressed their needs and educators listened. Ohio was one of three states asked by the U.S. government to host a language summit.

Galal Walker is the director of Ohio State University's Chinese Flagship Program. It's a masters program for advanced Chinese speakers designed to produce students with language fluency in a cultural context. Walker says he will extend the principles of his program to elementary schools with a pilot project starting next year. He says the goal is to help students develop language proficiency before college so they can achieve an area of academic expertise and functioning knowledge of a foreign language.

"People with those criteria, that background, are having a very good time choosing what type of career they want to pursue," he said. "They're not going to be out of work for very long."

Robert Slater is the director of the National Security Education Program is a liaison between national and local efforts to increase language education. He says demand for foreign language education programs in elementary schools is rising.

"We're watching school systems where parents are looking towards schools systems for their children that offer these opportunities," he said. "So in many cases the solution side of the equation has to catch up with the demand side."

Slater says this demand marks a growing awareness that speaking only English is not enough. Groups from Thursday's summit will meet throughout the summer to develop a five year language development plan to be announced October 25.

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