

The Salem Leader  
Educationally Speaking  
08/25/08  
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### **An Upside to the Upside Down Economy**

Schools are funny. For most youngsters, you spend your entire public school career hating the bus rides, despising half of your classmates, refusing to wake up early and getting angry with administrators for taking away the vending machines at lunch. Then, you get older and you're still avoiding half of your co-workers, refusing to wake up early and you're usually angry with your boss over something. The only difference is that most adults would welcome a bus that stopped by their house so they didn't have to drive to work.

Unfortunately, no one has managed to think up a solution. Some people say that we should just "enjoy the moment" and "relax – take life leisurely." Clearly, those people are wrong or possibly retired. Yes, a few people managed to finagle their way into working from home or just really love mornings, but let's face it: most of us do what we have to do and constantly look forward to Friday night with a pizza and a movie. If you're like me, you're already looking at retirement with envy.

Things aren't getting any better with our droopy-eyed economy. Politicians are scrambling to figure out a way to bring a factory to their town to "fix things again". Frankly, that's a really bad way of "fixing things". You get your community into a bind when you make the whole town reliant upon one or two large factories in a particular sector. See Salem for an example. Detroit is another good example.

Remarkably, people quickly figure out ways to get what they need to survive. In this downward economy, low-skill and high-paying jobs are becoming scarce. What I've believed for months is finally coming across to the people actually being affected: those jobs aren't coming back. Our economy is transforming like it did during the industrial revolution. There, farm jobs were quickly phased out and manufacturing jobs were the hot ticket. Today, manufacturing jobs are headed out the door to Mexico and other agriculturally based nations. In their place, high-paying, high-skilled jobs in the medical, engineering, science and liberal arts fields are taking their place.

As a result, one upside to our faltering economy is that adults young and old are making the decision to go back to school. Recently, Indiana University and Ivy Tech University announced that student enrollment is at or above record levels. The reason, they say, is that as the economy sputters, people can't find high-paying jobs to support themselves or their families with the skills they have. Therefore, people head back to the classroom and start to enhance their minds to enhance their lives.

Frankly, I think that's great news and it makes a lot of sense (that's probably why I love it). I'd love to see more people heading back to school. While it may be expensive at first, the results often offset the cost by hundreds of thousands of dollars over a lifetime. Admittedly, this isn't always true. In a capitalist society there will always be people poorer and wealthier than you. If everyone were college-educated, the high-paying jobs wouldn't seem so high paying as they are today. That, and we'd see a lot more Starbucks and Progressives around our communities.

I strongly encourage anyone in Washington County that dreams of having more money, more security or better living standards for their families to take the steps necessary to get yourself into a class. Washington County's SOAR program is a great start for adults that may not feel up to the challenge of more traditional classroom settings. Marji Morris oversees this terrific and free adult literacy program that can often be a stepping stone into a GED course or a track at Ivy Tech colleges around the state. Other alternatives include any number of classes taught for little or no cost at the Washington County Learning Center.

There's no reason to sit around and blame your politicians if you're out of a job or are struggling to make ends meet. There's no reason to point fingers at anyone at all. If you want to make it further in life financially or otherwise, it takes action and initiative to get there. As kids across the county head back to class, maybe you or someone you know can do the same.