



# City of Burnsville

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **BURNSVILLE BUSINESS WINS STATE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AWARD**

*Partners recognized for innovative training program for medical device company*

What do you get when four different government organizations partner with a local manufacturer to provide a network of support on a key workforce issue? In the case of Vital Signs Minnesota (VSM), a Burnsville business specializing in the production of medical devices, the result is being named the Best Workforce/Training Initiative project in the State by the Economic Development Association of Minnesota for 2006. The award – called an Edie Award -- was one of nine presented at the 2006 EDAM Summer Conference on June 21, 2006.

Vital Signs is a growing manufacturer of medical devices, a key focus area for the City of Burnsville. Currently a 75 employee company with 50 production employees, VSM anticipates a 15%-20% increase in production over the next 18 months. The company noted that 40% of their production employees are non-native English speaking, a factor which could limit growth. Improving English language skills would have the desired effect of improving communication, workplace safety, understanding of company policies, opportunities for advancement with the company and ultimately, overall productivity.

The English Learning Training Program was developed to address this issue. Skip Nienhaus, Burnsville Economic Development Coordinator, worked cooperatively with the Dakota-Scott County Workforce Investment Board (WIB) and Workforce Centers to research available resources to address the issue. It was learned that an \$11,500 English Learning Training Grant Fund was available. The requirements included an employer match - VSM matched the full \$11,500 – and coordination with a training provider. ISD 191's Adult Basic Education program was able to customize a training program to meet the exact needs of the company. The program included twenty students meeting twice weekly in two-hour classes for 15 weeks. The classes were held on-location at VSM. The State Department of Employment and Economic Development played an important role in coordinating the proposal for the project.

“Without the grant, VSM would not have had the financial resources to offer this program,” commented Sharon Olszewski, the person responsible for Finance and Human Resources for Vital Signs. “Our workers are dedicated, hard working people who need help with their English language skills to help them on the job and in their daily life outside of work.” Vital Signs Minnesota ([www.vitalsigns.com](http://www.vitalsigns.com)) is located at 12250 Nicollet Avenue South in Burnsville.

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“Burnsville is continually looking for ways to help our business community,” commented Skip Nienhaus, Burnsville Economic Development Coordinator. “We know how important a qualified, skilled workforce is to our employers and their long-term success.” In particular, this training program supports the direction of the Burnsville Medical Alliance, a strategic effort to support and attract medical device companies and build on the city’s past success in the delivery of medical services. View the [www.burnsvillemedical.com](http://www.burnsvillemedical.com) web site for details.

A key to success for the program was the participation of the Adult Basic Education program from Burnsville-Eagan-Savage ISD 191. “This project gets to the heart of what ABE is all about – helping citizens who are operating at the edge of our communities to be better prepared to take their place as fully productive members,” stated Kevin Avise, the ABE coordinator from ISD 191. “It’s a textbook example of what a successful program should include: highly motivated and committed employers and specific needs that can be impacted by improved English skills,”

EDAM has more than 450 members who represent private enterprise, local and regional economic development agencies, chambers of commerce and utilities. The Edie awards are given annually at the EDAM Summer Conference to recognize individuals or organizations that deserve recognition for outstanding economic achievement. More information is available on the internet at [www.edam.state.mn.us](http://www.edam.state.mn.us).



The Burnsville/VSM English Language Training Program received one of nine State Awards for Excellence in Economic Development from the Economic Development Association of Minnesota. Accepting the award, front row-left to right, LaDonna Boyd, Dakota County Workforce Investment Board/Work Force Centers, Sharon LaFrance Olszewski, Vital Signs, back row- left to right, Kevin Avise, ISD 191 Adult Basic Education, Deb Robertson, Vital Signs, and Skip Nienhaus, City of Burnsville.

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