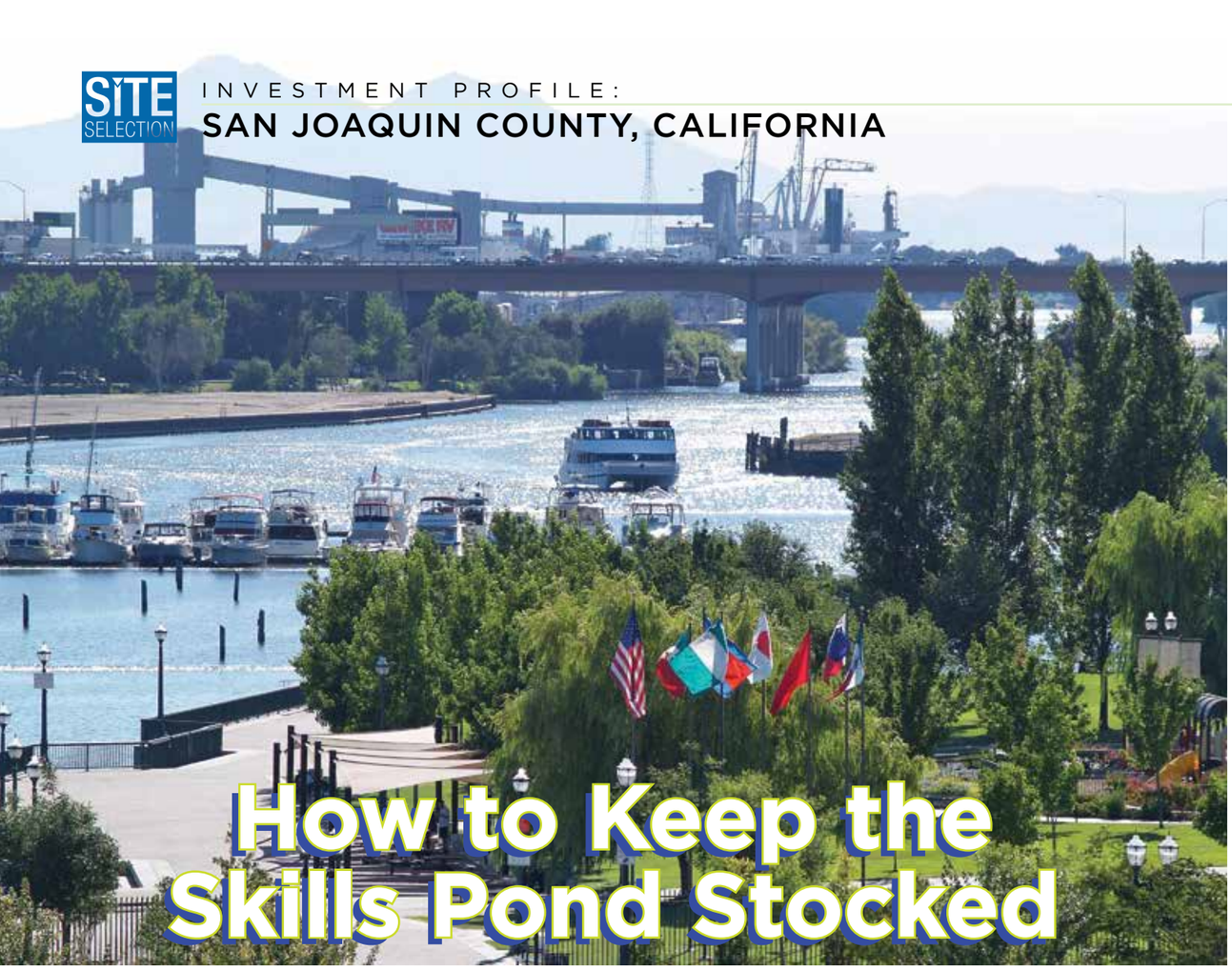


How to Keep the Skills Pond Stocked

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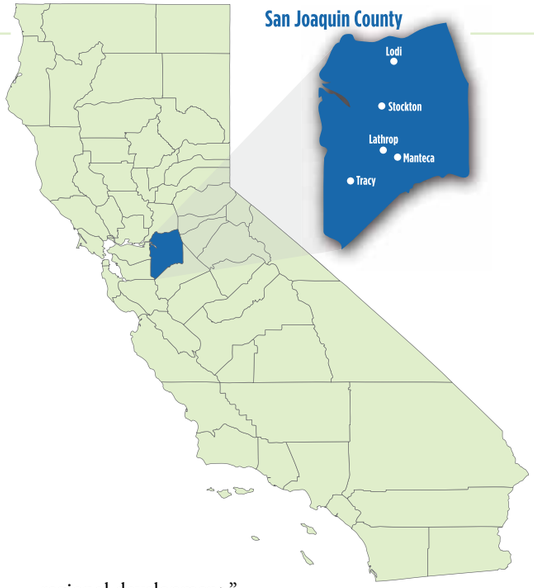
Ask any corporate site selector or location consultant what their chief location requirement is, and it will have to do with availability of skills they or their client must be able to access. That means technical skills and credentials as well as soft skills like critical thinking, leadership and a strong work ethic. It is incumbent on local communities to take stock of their supply of skills and to be able to quantify them relative to other communities when capital investors come to town to kick the tires. It's just as important to have in place workforce resources that ensure a steady supply of talent with the skills required today and in the future. Lacking those, investors won't stay in town very long.

California's most inland port and a key regional logistics asset — and the Stockton Marina and Joan Darrah Promenade.
Photo courtesy of Greater Stockton Chamber of Commerce

California's Central Valley — particularly counties like San Joaquin and Stanislaus — can offer investors an attractive alternative to Bay Area locations in terms of labor and housing costs. But they know they need more than proximity to Silicon Valley to attract corporate investment and stem the flow of workers, many tens of thousands of them each day, from commuting to jobs outside the region. They need resources like iHub San Joaquin (iHub SJ), one of ten California Inclusive Innovation Hubs (iHub²) designated by Governor Gavin Newsom, and the Valley Occupational Learning and Technology Institute (VOLT) training center in Modesto that caters to workers around the region.

Solutions for Regional Development

"The mission of iHub SJ is to spark new innovations in the region by fostering a diverse entrepreneurial ecosystem and connecting major industry sectors including healthcare, agriculture and sustainable construction to opportunities that can accelerate economic development and the use of more efficient technologies," says Brenna Butler Garcia, Vice President, Community Relations, at A.G. Spanos Companies. "iHub SJ is a link between the private and public sectors interfacing with advanced technologies and innovators developing solutions for regional development."



The board of iHub SJ is comprised of government representatives from all the San Joaquin County cities, the county, economic and workforce development agencies, healthcare organizations, education and post-secondary education institutions, industry and entrepreneur and incubator service providers. Garcia says an iHub Advisory Council was established in 2021, representing "a diverse coalition of technical service providers, workforce development groups, green economy advocates, environmental justice and business associations to create an inclusive and comprehensive strategy to spark innovation in the Valley by leveraging the full capacity of our community's assets."

iHub SJ harnesses these assets to stimulate partnerships, economic development and job creation by providing an innovation platform for emerging entrepreneurs and business owners to grow their businesses and ideas with the combined resources of industry and civic incubators, economic development organizations, technical assistance providers, start-up incubators, diverse business advocates, industry subject matter experts, funding resources, higher education and research institutions and financial vehicles.

Several efforts are underway to advance San Joaquin County workers and scale the skilled workforce. Garcia explains: "This ecosystem includes educational partners the University of the Pacific and San Joaquin Delta College, both of which launched robust, self-funded internship programs to serve the business community. The City of Stockton was also awarded a grant for youth workforce development within the city (ages 16-30). Additionally, industry has led and funded the creation of HealthForce Partners, to design data-driven solutions to address local healthcare workforce challenges and expand opportunities for regional residents.

'Similarly," she adds, "the San Joaquin County Office of Education sought to address a regional need for software engineers with the establishment of CodeStack Academy. The adult learner curriculums include both instructor-led and project-based learning with day or evening classes available. The academy culminates with a guaranteed internship and tuition assistance makes registration possible for everyone."

Strategic Response to the Skills Gap

In addition to traditional degrees and educational completions, the last few years have continued to stress the importance and value of Career Technical Education (CTE) programs across the nation, notes April Potter, Vice President of Economic Development, Research and Communications at Opportunity Stanislaus.

"In response to this growing skills gap, one of the most strategic options has been the creation of the Valley Occupational Learning and Technology Institute (VOLT), an industry-led, fast-paced training center that takes under-skilled or unskilled workers from the community and turns them into skilled workers with the attitude and aptitude to fill the now-vacant, skilled manufacturing jobs as well as openings that arise in the future," says Potter. "Most of these are well-paying jobs that contribute to higher standards of living and assist in closing the poverty gap. VOLT has been well received at local, state and national levels and has created many partnership and collaboration opportunities between Opportunity Stanislaus, community partners, Stanislaus County, Stanislaus County Workforce Development, and many others."

Potter says VOLT Institute has changed the landscape of the current and future workforce for the region as a whole — Stanislaus County and beyond. In addition to creating industry-led training programs like Industrial Maintenance Mechanics and Automation/Robotics/Mechatronics (ARM), it recently received a grant from the Federal Economic Development Administration that will allow it to take its programs directly on site to industry.

"We continue to branch out our programs to meet the needs of a diverse set of industries," Potter relates. "We are currently working on creating an Automated Logistics Training Program that will expand our abilities. In addition to our hard skilled training programs, we are also serving businesses by offering soft skill programs such as our Senior Leadership Series, Supervisor Development Academy, Rising Tides, Best Foot Forward and others that any business can take advantage of that helps develop essential skills the workforce needs. This will help us to continue to ensure that our future workforce is prepared at all levels." ▼

This Investment Profile was prepared under the auspices of the San Joaquin Partnership.
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