

Building Pathways to Bridge the Gap between Job seekers and Manufacturing Positions

The North Carolina Manufacturing Institute (NCMI) initiative was conceived by leaders from Rowan and Cabarrus counties from both chambers of commerce, economic development authorities, the Centralina Workforce Development Board and Rowan-Cabarrus Community College, in the summer of 2014. It is a response to area employers' need for solving talent recruitment issues in order to grow and remain competitive. This initiative builds a clear and achievable pathway for people to acquire those skills in order to access good jobs in local communities.

"Manufacturing jobs are among the fastest growing in the nation. In fact, 13.7 percent of private-sector jobs are in manufacturing," said Robert Van Geons, Executive Director for RowanWORKS, Economic Development. "These are also well-paying jobs with benefits with the average annual salary of \$68,887, for the 3,010 new manufacturing jobs created in North Carolina last year."

The growth and popularity of these clean, high-tech jobs has led to a high demand for a qualified workforce. Currently, more than 15 manufacturing firms in the Salisbury/Concord area just north of Charlotte, NC -- including Alevo, S&D Coffee, and Perdue Farms -- have benefited.

By partnering with NCMI they gain access to a pipeline of screened, trained, certified technicians who can help them achieve their business goals. Its innovative funding and operational structure allows the Institute to deliver results in response to a rapidly-growing need for manufacturing employees with certified skills and verified work readiness.

All participants of the program sit for MSSC's national assessment and graduate as Certified Production Technicians (CPTs). This coveted certification is validation to manufacturers that an individual has the skills and problem-solving abilities to be successful. The employers still perform training on the actual equipment they use and acclimate new employees to the company's culture. Thanks to support from local manufacturers, this training is free for the students.

"Our scholarship fund, financed by local employers, ensures that we can offer this training at no cost to the individual. They also plan to hire many of the graduates," said Craig Lamb, Vice President of Corporate and Continuing Education at Rowan-Cabarrus. "Individuals will train 20 hours per week for a total of eight weeks. Upon completion, they will be qualified for 90 percent of manufacturing jobs in our area."

Remarkably, their first class had a 100% passing rate. One reason for this and NCMI's success is its commitment to recruiting senior level manufacturing plant managers with decades of experience to teach MSSC's curriculum.

They also use ACT's WorkKeys Job Skills Assessment System which measures foundational and soft skills and offers specialized assessments to target institutional needs as a screening tool. All selected participants must earn ACT's WorkKeys National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) prior to starting their eight-week, 160-hour CPT training program. The stackable system of NCRC and CPT help ensure that individuals have the academic and employability skills needed to enter a demanding world of advanced manufacturing.

"This is a way that we're going to build a world class talent pool so we can keep people here," said Patrick Coughlin, president and CEO of the Cabarrus Regional Chamber of Commerce.

For more information on NCMI, please visit www.ncmanufacturinginstitute.com and contact Paula Dibley, 704-903-2738 paula.dibley@rccc.edu