



Vermeer and DBR – Addressing the workforce skills gap

Background:

Vermeer produces agricultural and industrial equipment that is built tough, built to perform, built for value and backed by caring customer service. Based in Pella, Iowa, Vermeer employs over 3,000 team members. Because of the nature of its business, the majority of Vermeer team members are highly skilled welders, machinists and other production experts. Committed to providing continual training opportunities for its employees, Vermeer developed a Metal Inert Gas (MIG) welding training program. The program has been recognized as outstanding by the American Welding Society (AWS). Vermeer's challenge, however, was finding enough skilled employees to fulfill its significant workforce needs.

Challenge:

There is a nationwide shortage of welders, particularly highly technical MIG welders. The shortage is compounded in rural communities, such as Pella, despite the opportunities offered by companies like Vermeer. The lack of a fully-staffed operation impacts production time and threatened to limit Vermeer's growth potential.

Solution:

To help solve their technical welding workforce shortage, Vermeer partnered with Des Moines Area Community College's Business Resources department (DBR) and DMACC Continuing Education to deliver a publically-offered enhanced MIG welding training program available broadly throughout Central Iowa. Vermeer provided its award-winning curriculum and DMACC provided an affordable and accessible certificate program. The resulting MIG welding program has very high performance expectations and the graduates have been rewarded with outstanding job opportunities. Given the demanding nature of the program, and in respect to the substantial investment by Vermeer, DMACC expends tremendous effort determining a career pathway for each student that leads to employment upon training completion. As a public Community College, DMACC is able to use state funds such as "PACE" and "GAP" as well as the Iowa New Jobs Training Program to ensure the training is accessible and affordable.

Results:

Both program participants and Vermeer have greatly benefitted from the Vermeer-DMACC partnership. Since February, 2012, five program cohorts have been offered. To date:

- A total of 56 students have graduated from the program (91% completion rate)
- 91% of graduates have been offered employment (51). 41 of these were offered employment at Vermeer.
- Retention for the highly-skilled program graduates hired by Vermeer exceeds 80%.

Vermeer continues to invest in welding training opportunities by providing DMACC with materials, fabricating welding coupons, and allowing DMACC to utilize its AWS awarded curriculum in its public offering courses.

"We have been able to partner with DBR in developing very innovative and successful models for recruiting, assessing, and training Vermeer employees. Models that are addressing our demand for highly skilled employees, especially welders."

– Mary Vermeer Andringa, CEO and Chair of the Board, Vermeer Corporation