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LOCAL OWATC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP TO GENERATE PUBLIC INTEREST IN MANUFACTURING CAREERS

Lloyd McCaffrey has some tough decisions to make these days. With growing demand and a shrinking pool of highly skilled workers, he may have to recommend supporting the future planned growth of his manufacturing facilities somewhere other than Utah. McCaffrey, Director of Manufacturing Technology for Williams International, is not alone. There is an estimated shortage of 300 machinists just in Weber County. "We are at a critical point in our workforce development," stated Matt Wardle, owner of JD Machine. "We have the jobs available; we just need the trained workforce to grow our business."

With baby boomers retiring, and along with them experience and high-tech skills, many companies are wondering where the next generation of machinists, welders and other high-tech workers will be found.

So why are these jobs so hard to fill? Several factors have a direct impact on that question. Unemployment is at a record 2.6% low. Virtually everyone who wants to work is currently employed. When unemployment is down, so are enrollments at educational and training institutions. "The sad thing is," said Dax Teuscher, Business Consultant for the Department of Workforce Services. "Some people are working two or more jobs to make ends meet. They are so focused on making a living, they may not realize that with short term training to upgrade their skills, they could be working in a better job and making a much higher salary."

Another factor is that the majority of people don't know what machinists and other manufacturing workers do. Many people still perceive manufacturing jobs as blue collar, and dirty. In reality, most are conducted in a very clean environment where many workers wear lab coats and rely on computer programming skills to get the job done.

Manufacturing's role in promoting job and income growth is often misunderstood. Although overall industrial jobs have diminished since the late 1970s, the loss has been concentrated largely in lower-skilled positions. The number of higher-skilled positions, with a median hourly wage of \$24, jumped by more than 36% between 1983 and 2002 to nearly 4.5 million, according to a 2006 study by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York (Wall Street Journal, August 2007).

Although manufacturing jobs requiring low-end skills are being outsourced to other countries, the upside is that jobs requiring high-end skills with higher salaries have remained in the United States. With the demand increasing for skilled employees, so is the demand to find a solution.

“Workforce development will be the hot topic for the economy in the next decade,” stated Collette Mercier, President at Ogden-Weber Applied Technology College. “In response, we have been working with manufacturing employers in Weber County to develop a model to attract young people into these high-tech and high paying jobs.”

Foreseeing the trend seven years ago, Weber Economic Development Corporation, the Chamber, machining employers from Weber County and the marketing department at OWATC began meeting to design a strategic marketing plan targeting young people and adults to take a look at machining as a lucrative and engaging career choice. Together they created an innovative solution.

They created a new website, www.numaching.com, and produced a DVD aimed at educating the public and generating interest in machining as a career. The effort paid off for employers as interest increased and much needed help became trained and ready for employment. A year ago, this group met again to refine the concepts and engage in another marketing blitz.

This time, employers like Parker, Williams International, JD Machine, and others contributed over \$30,000 to blanket the area with eye-catching messages about the demand for machinists. The largest donation was by Haas, a national manufacture of CNC machine tools. Although Haas will not benefit directly by hiring any of the students, it sees OWATC’s program as a model that will have a direct impact on the growth of the machining industry nationwide.

Beyond the marketing campaign, employers are also offering to pay for student training in a program called “A Job and a Scholarship.” Prospective employees fill out an application online through the OWATC website at www.owatc.edu/machine. Qualified candidates are then matched with employers, which will help fund the student’s formal training while working. In addition, some applicants receive introductory scholarships to help them get enough training to become employable. Students then continue their training while working. “We’ve had tremendous response to this concept,” said Rhonda Boren, Vice President of Student Services at the OWATC. “People are able to get into better paying jobs and employers are paying for their training. In return, employers are able to tap an up-and-coming pool of talent right away.”

Enrollments in the machining program are steadily increasing with a goal of doubling new enrollments within one year. Financial support for this public/private partnership has also come from the Ogden-Weber Chamber of Commerce and Weber Economic Development Corporation. Executive Director, Ron Kusina said, “These types of partnerships are the most important factor in workforce development.”

Other private companies are beginning to take notice. Local employers who hire welders and construction workers have expressed interest in stamping out the model for their companies. “We believe that this campaign will be a catalyst for other industries,” said Mercier. “As they begin to see positive results, we will continue to facilitate these kinds of partnerships to help them meet the demand.”

In addition, the new Lean Manufacturing Training Center located at Business Depot Ogden (BDO) began operation this fall. It is a state-of-the-art facility designed to provide instruction in lean principles that can not only be applied to machining, but any business setting. The lean

center features over \$30 million in equipment and is the only one of its kind in the United States. It was made possible by an innovative collaboration of private industry partnering with education to find solutions for growing demands. “We are doing more than recruiting workers into training programs,” stated Boren “We are ensuring the viability of some of our country’s most important high-paying jobs.”

Currently the Ogden-Weber Applied Technology College trains students in more than 60 programs in health, construction, business, manufacturing and service occupations to help meet employment demands for Weber County and surrounding areas. Currently, 90% of new jobs providing a wage sufficient to sustain a family of four require some combination of technical education and on-the-job-training (ACT Ready for College, May, 2006). The OWATC provides that combination by partnering with employers who act as advisors for curriculum and hire trained students.

“Finding skilled workers has been a challenge,” stated McCaffrey, “but with partnerships like we have with the ATC, great things are on the horizon.”

For more information about the machining program and how to apply for a job and a scholarship visit www.owatc.edu/machine

For more information about the new Lean Manufacturing Training Center visit www.owatc.edu/lean

For more information about machining visit www.NUmachining.com

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