

WESTCHESTER WORKFORCE GAINS MOMENTUM IN MANUFACTURING

In 2021, skilled laborers are some of the most sought-after applicants in the manufacturing sector. With a major skills gap across the county and countless businesses suffering from the impact of the pandemic, manufacturers find that hiring qualified talent is more important than ever before. Westchester County is stepping up to address this issue head-on to benefit both employers and employees.

The Westchester County Office of Economic Development has formed initiatives to expand the local manufacturing sector and prepare potential talent for careers in the industry. In January, with help from the Council of Industry, it established an advanced manufacturing task force to focus on expanding jobs and introducing local manufacturers to talent.

The pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs in place across Westchester County will help stimulate economic growth and fill open entry-level manufacturing positions. According to the New York State Department of Labor's 2018 statistics, the manufacturing sector pays an average annual wage of \$105,703 in Westchester, the fifth highest of ranked industries for the county. It reported the average annual employment in the county's manufacturing was 12,984 hires.

"Advanced manufacturing is an in-demand industry in Westchester County that offers high

wages. The goal of this pre-apprenticeship program will help build a pool of qualified applicants for employers to tap into which will ultimately improve productivity, profitability and competitiveness,"



Bantam Tools' David Matera is visually inspecting a plate.

says Westchester County Executive George Latimer. “This program is ideal for individuals with limited to no prior knowledge of manufacturing to begin their career path. We want to give people living in this county an open door for advancement.”

The county’s newest endeavor is the advanced manufacturing pre-apprenticeship program, whose focus is building a pipeline of candidates suitable for employment at local manufacturing companies. The program will launch its first cohort in November 2021.

“People can have a fantastic career in manufacturing,” says Bridget Gibbons, Director, Economic Development Westchester County, who is the lead partner on the program. “After the pandemic people are leaving certain industries and finding opportunities that suit their skills.

There’s a clear career path in this sector.”

The pre-apprenticeship program will offer Certified Production Technician (CPT) 4.0 certification through the Manufacturing Skill Standards Council (MSSC) to those who successfully complete assessments. The program offers individual certificate assessments in the following areas: Safety, Quality Practices & Measurement, Manufacturing Processes & Production, Maintenance Awareness, Green Production (Not part of Full CPT Certification).

Certificates will be presented to individuals who “demonstrate mastery of the foundational, core competencies of advanced manufacturing production at the entry-level to front-line supervisor,” according to MSSC. Ideal program candidates will be those with limited to no experience in manufacturing.

Candidates who receive a certificate of completion will be ready to be employed by any manufacturer as an apprentice through the Council of Industry’s apprentice program. These apprenticeships vary in length from 16 months to four years in trades including CNC machinist, toolmaker, maintenance mechanic, industrial manufacturing technician, and more. This allows for a seamless transition from pre-apprenticeship to apprenticeship.

“The key issue for manufacturers in Westchester is that they cannot hire people because there’s not a pipeline of talent. This makes it hard for businesses to grow,” Gibbons says. “My hope is that the whole sector begins to blossom and we can recruit more employees for the advanced manufacturing ecosystem.”

Westchester Community College (WCC) is partnering with Westchester County Office of Economic Development and coordinating with the Council of Industry to develop the pre-apprenticeship program. Instructors from the college will be teaching courses, many of whom are experienced professionals

in the manufacturing sector. The college will offer a hands-on, immersive manufacturing experience for those in the pre-apprenticeship program.

Additionally, WCC offers a National Institute of Metalworking Skills (NIMS) program for those with limited to no experience in the industry. The three-course program spans 189 total hours

of instruction, which runs at least once per year. Courses offered include Introduction to Manufacturing, Advanced Manufacturing: CNC Milling Operator, and Advanced Manufacturing: CNC Turning Operator. Students who successfully complete the courses can test for and receive four certifications from the National Institute of Metalworking Skills (NIMS). It typically takes less than a year to complete.

Non-degree seeking students have opportunities in short-term workforce development in manufacturing at WCC. Those looking to further their education can explore degree opportunities, including Mechanical Technology A.A.S.

“WCC has something for any stakeholder in the advanced manufacturing sector. If you’re looking to get into a sector that provides you with a sustainable, living wage, advanced manufacturing is the way to go,” says Charles McGinnis, Assistant Dean, Workforce Development at WCC. “The college can provide the training you need to get into those career building fields.”

The college works through the SUNY Apprenticeship Grant Program to help defray costs and provide tuition assistance for students. With grant initiatives, select students who meet criteria could have the entire program cost covered. Employers also benefit from the program, receiving tax credits of as much as \$4,000 per year per worker, enrolled as an apprentice. Even short-term workforce programs offer financial assistance. The pre-apprenticeship program will allow the college to assist local manufacturers in providing a pool of prospective employees and on-the-job training for candidates.

McGinnis anticipates success in the pre-apprenticeship program and looks to fulfill the needs of both students and local manufacturers. “We want local manufacturers to help inform our direction on what we provide and what we offer,” he says. “It’s a robust program of study opportunity in a growing field that provides a career opportunity.”

Council of Industry member and advanced manufacturer Bantam Tools in Peekskill, NY, has worked alongside the Westchester County Office of Economic Development and WCC. The company enrolled in the Council of Industry’s apprenticeship program in May to develop budding talent and create an internal



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pipeline. Today, three apprentices are working side-by-side with a mentor to learn the ins and outs of CNC milling, the company's specialty.

Ron Lorentzen, General Manager at Bantam Tools, explains the success of the program. "We have taken some young, very capable, well minded individuals and selected them to address the skills gap and create homegrown talent," he says. "The apprentices are very engaged."

Lorentzen explains education is a part of the company's "DNA." Bantam manufactures desktop CNC mills commonly used in schools' STEM programs and now, it looks to teach apprentices and expand knowledge of CNC to local manufacturers. "As an organization, we're very involved in partnering with people like the Council of Industry and trying to educate people on what manufacturing is all about."

Bantam chose its apprentices from an internal pool of employees, focusing on those who display exceptional work ethic, attention to detail, and quality of work. Lorentzen says one

employee had only been working for several weeks before being selected as an apprentice. Choosing internal candidates helps reduce turnover and equips apprentices with the skills they need to succeed in Bantam.

Christian Meyer is currently an apprentice at Bantam learning the trade of CNC Machinist. Meyer started his apprenticeship

with specific career goals but no prior experience. "Bantam Tools was the group that opened their doors for me to develop the desired skill set that I was seeking," he says. "They understand the goals that I've set in place and are supportive of their apprentice's navigation through the program."

Meyer explains there are two areas of the apprenticeship –on-the-job experience and related instruction– that require fulfillment to complete the program. Meyer completes on-the-job requirements by completing daily operations

with his mentor. Related instruction has helped him excel in the work environment through curricular engagement.

Looking ahead, Meyer plans to grow with the company as he expands his knowledge of the trade each day. He considers the



Bantam Tools' apprentice Christian Meyer reaching for a gauge.

To learn more about the Pre-Apprenticeship program, email: advancedmanufacturing@westchestergov.com

If you're a prospective student or a company looking to partner with WCC, contact: Charles McGinnis charles.mcginnis@sunywcc.edu

program a personal investment that will allow him to become a machinist. "My best suggestion is to be passionate about the trade you are pursuing and approach it with a high level of dedication," he says. "Your future self not only depends on your commitment to the program but will be appreciative of all the opportunities drawn to you following."

In the future, Lorentzen anticipates expanding the program and taking on more apprentices. He notes the significance of work ethic and team player mentality at Bantam. "As we develop and release more products there will be higher demand for the skillset. We're a team of people reaching a common goal together," he says. "The apprentices of today will be the mentors of tomorrow."

With a changing economy and more open positions in manufacturing than ever, teaching and hiring new talent will prove essential to the sector. As partners, Westchester County, WCC, Bantam Tools, and the Council of Industry anticipate growth in the industry and aim to educate others on the benefits of a career in manufacturing.

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