



EAMA RSP Hybrid Meeting Notes

April 17, 2024

Welcome - Chair **Chris Jewell from Collins & Jewell** started the meeting at 9:03 a.m. He opened the floor for any employers to share their recent accomplishments.

- **Chris Jewell** shared that Collins & Jewell was asked by CBIA to be part of a video montage about opening doors in manufacturing which was aired at the CT Workforce Summit.
- **Sarah Adams from Foster Corp.** shared that she is also the president of the Northeast CT Human Resources Association (NECHRA) and they had a successful career fair at Ellis Technical High School with 15 employers participating. It was the first time Ellis Tech had done a career fair for their students and they hope to hold it as an annual event.
- **Hannah Belmont from Westminster Tool** shared that Will, one of their new hires from the MPI, did a great job presenting his story at the CT Workforce Summit.

Chris welcomed **Paul Lavoie, Chief Manufacturing Officer**, and **Ayanti Grant from Congressman Courtney's office**. He also introduced new EAMA RSP members **Bill Martel – Fox Hill Swiss Machine**, **John Genna - JG Creations, LLC**, and **Justin Soja - Alpha Q**.

Employer Instant Poll – The question posed to the members was a follow up to the poll from the February meeting where members were asked “what keeps you up at night”? The results identified recruiting, retaining, and training as the primary reason manufacturers were losing sleep. This poll drilled down to rank those three from most worrisome to least worrisome. The results were close with training taking the lead as the biggest concern.

Employer feedback included:

- **Hannah Belmont** said hiring is not Westminster Tool's top priority since they have a wait list. Training is one of their top costs. About 50% of their shop is cross training at any given time; the training is internally created.
- **Chris Jewell** said that Collins & Jewell is two years out from having five senior leaders retiring and needs to start backfilling those leadership positions by training up existing workers.

The group was asked: If you ranked training highest – is the emphasis on training new people or people who have been with you a while? Feedback included:

- **Meredith Shay – InCord** – InCord has mainly been investing in training office staff who don't have the customer service skills needed in the areas of phone/email/cold calling. They have sustainable cross training in place for their entry level manufacturing positions but it's the soft skills they need to work on. InCord customizes training using a platform called Skool that their new office hires go through during their first six months.
- **Jeff Dickey – The Lee Co.** – Jeff shared that The Lee Co. is in three markets. Medical is not doing well, automotive and light industrials are relatively flat, but aerospace is booming. They are investing in cross training people to move them over to aerospace.

Eastern Advanced Manufacturing Alliance – A Connecticut Regional Sector Partnership

Lastly, Chris Jewell asked the group: why are people who leave your company going elsewhere? He shared that, for Collins & Jewell, people leave primarily for more money. Comments included:

- **Jeff Dickey** – At the Lee Company, money was the predominant reason 6 months ago, but now they are finding that more people are moving for other reasons such as relocating.
- **Shawn Coyne, Electric Boat** – Shawn ranked retention #1 because EB feels that training is part of retention. They see that if people don't get the training they need fast enough, retention is a problem. He also feels that people are leaving less for economic concerns and more for other reasons.

Updates from Working Groups

Workforce & Outreach – **Jeff Dickey** reported that Ashley Falke, HR Manager at Miyoshi America, was the guest speaker at their last meeting and shared some of the things they are doing to change the culture. These included: updating their attendance policy, adding a \$1,000 employee referral bonus which is paid out after 90 days, doing a breakroom upgrade including a massage chair, instituting Wellness Wednesday, engaging in volunteer work, and installing a nursing room. Jeff commented that “everyone needs an Ashley”; she has the support of upper management and listens to the staff.

Business 2 Business – **Dan Chaplin, Forge 41** – The B2B group will host a webinar about setting up and polishing profiles on CONNEX; the date and time to be announced.

Bernice Zampano from CONNSTEP encouraged members to reach out to her at bzampano@connstep.org for one-on-one assistance with CONNEX.

Next Steps: If you are interested in joining the B2B Working Group, please contact EAMA RSP Director Tony Benoit at eamarsp@gmail.com.

Plastics – **Hannah Belmont, Westminster Tool** – The hands-on portion of the Plastics training started with on-site classes split between Westminster Tool and Putnam Plastics. She is reaching out directly to companies who participated in the last class for feedback and will also contact those plastics employers who did not participate to find out why. The next class will be held in the fall at CT State - Quinebaug Valley.

Next Steps: If you are interested in the Plastics training or know other plastics companies that might be interested, contact Hannah at hbelmont@westminstertool.com.

Youth Pipeline – **Tony Benoit** – The new working group held its first meeting with 17 people participating. He thanked **Jessica van der Swaagh from SPIROL** and **Willie Barber from Electric Boat (EB)** for agreeing to serve as Co-Chairs. Among the focal points that emerged were the creation of a landscape analysis for schools and employers and a continued emphasis on employability skills. ReadyCT is under contract to work with YMPI and wants to hear from employers about what workplace skills they value. The working group heard about all the great work that EB is doing with young people. EB is happy to bring other EAMA RSP members into these activities, extending the reach of all Eastern CT firms.

CT State Update – **Erin Sullivan** – Erin offered her assistance to EAMA RSP members who have questions about CT State or how CT State can help them. Employers may reach her at ESullivan@trcc.comnet.edu. She also shared that CT State - Three Rivers is looking for input about interest in a Spanish in the Workplace class.

Next Steps: If you are interested in Spanish in the Workplace training, complete the survey [here](#).

Director's Report

Director Tony Benoit reported that, while the **Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act of 2024** passed the House with a large majority, it now seems stalled and unlikely to be passed by the Senate in this term.

Second Chance Hiring Initiative – EAMA RSP presented a webinar with Jacqueline Gallo from Pursuit Aerospace who described the great success of Pursuit (formerly Whitcraft) with hiring justice-involved individuals. The CT NAACP One Million Jobs Campaign is hiring staff, and EAMA RSP/EWIB expects to have candidates for employers' consideration within the coming weeks.

Next Steps: Tony encouraged members who indicated they were interested in, or companies that might like to get involved with the second chance hiring initiative to complete the survey [here](#). (Note: This survey is more specific than the one sent out late last fall and will help us direct candidates to the right pathways.)

Updates on EAMA RSP Responsibilities & Initiatives

Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (MPI) – **Carol LaBelle** from **EWIB** reported that, for the program year starting on July 1, 2023, we have enrolled 814 MPI participants and started 71 training classes. 19 more classes are scheduled to take place by June 30.

Carol also mentioned that there will be a class of welders graduating in May and encouraged EAMA RSP members to reach out to the Business Services Team if they are interested in these candidates.

Next Steps: Reach out to Jeff Martel, jmartel@qvcc.edu or Joelle Garrett, jgarrett@chamberect.com if you are interested in interviewing the welding graduates.

Youth Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (YMPI) – **David Allard** from **EWIB** reported that there will be a YMPI Career Fair in partnership with the Greater Norwich Chamber of Commerce for the YMPI students on **Friday, May 3** at the Norwich Holiday Inn with 215 students from 12 schools scheduled to attend. The first Youth Employability Skills (YES) Academy, delivered in partnership with ReadyCT, was completed at Norwich Free Academy (NFA) with 23 manufacturing and healthcare students participating in the 4-day event during their spring break.

Other

Partner Corner – **Charles Daniels, President, Connect Energy Resources** – Charles shared some of the highlights that will be covered during the upcoming Lunch & Learn webinar and encouraged EAMA RSP members to attend on **Tuesday, May 21 at 12:00 pm** to learn more about easy things your company can do to reduce energy costs. Members are encouraged to share the invitation with their CFO, accounting manager and facilities/maintenance manager.

Next Steps: Register for the Energy Savings webinar [here](#).

Networking Event – Members are encouraged to attend the EAMA RSP Networking Event on **Wednesday, May 15, 4:30-6:30 pm** at The Lee Company.

News of Interest – Chris Jewell highlighted the following items:

Article in CT Mirror that covered the WIOA Reauthorization bill passing the House and asked Ayanti Grant from Congressman Courtney's office about the status of this bill with the Senate. Ayanti commented that the CT Senators are on board with it; we have a solid delegation when it comes to

workforce development. She thanked EAMA RSP for their support and asked for continued input and support.

Chris also congratulated **Mary Fitzgerald, Acme Wire** President on her induction into the American Manufacturing Hall of Fame, and **Hannah Belmont, Westminster Tool** on being featured in an article in *Plastic News*.

Next EAMA RSP Hybrid meeting: Wednesday, June 19, 9:00-10:15 a.m.