Business Express: Manufacturing's Comeback Story

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Business Express
Chamber of Commerce Eastern Connecticut

What was once on the decline is making a strong comeback in eastern Connecticut.

Manufacturing jobs are growing in this part of the state, fueled by the defense industry and business expansions at Electric Boat and other companies part of a 59-member consortium known as the Eastern Advanced Manufacturing Consortium (EAMA).

To meet the demand for this highly skilled workforce, the Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board (EWIB) is revitalizing the workforce through a nationally recognized program called the Manufacturing Pipeline initiative. The Pipeline program provides customized skills training classes for jobseekers aligned to the specific hiring needs of regional manufacturers.

The Pipeline is funded by a $6 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, one of only six programs in the country to be recognized late in 2015. The training classes began six months later in April 2016.

"The Manufacturing Pipeline initiative is a win-win for the jobseeker and the employers in our region," said John Beauregard, President of EWIB. "The jobseeker gains vital job-specific skills designed by the employer while the employer gains access to a talent pipeline to improve their workforce. The feedback from everyone has been great."

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Since last year, EWIB has received nearly 4,000 applications in the portal on its website, eight times more than anticipated. New enrollees continue to apply at a brisk rate. Program applicants may then be selected to attend the training classes, taught locally through partnerships with regional community colleges and technical high schools.

The program has graduated 14 classes to date, with focus on the machining and welding trades. 161 people, or 94% of the training class graduates, have received immediate employment offers.

"There is great demand for this program," said Mark Hill, Chief Operating Officer at EWIB. "Jobseekers realize that manufacturing offers really good career opportunities. We are looking forward to the future and expanding upon what the team has been able to do so far."

Later this year, the Pipeline program will expand training classes to other job functions like pipefitting, drafting & design, and electrical. These trades are in-demand from regional employers like Electric Boat (EB). To date, EB has hired 88% of the program's employed.

"The Manufacturing Pipeline has really helped Electric Boat," said Patrick Reuss, Director of Program Resourcing at the company. "It has improved both our candidate quantity and quality, and received great feedback from our hiring managers in the shipyard. We look forward to continue to work with our partners in this program."

The Pipeline also has spurred $536,000 in private philanthropic contributions, showcasing the power of innovation to help stimulate private investment.

Program officials have cited the partnership of stakeholders as the underlying reason for the success. Those partners include employers, community colleges, the technical high school system, various state & local workforce and economic development agencies, and the federal political delegation, who was critical in procuring grants to support the Pipeline program.

"EWIB has instrumental in the comeback of our region's economy," said Tony Sheridan, President of the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut. "They're taking the lead in people back to work in our state, and at the same time, creating an innovative approach to fostering workforce development nationally. They should be celebrated for their forward-thinking."