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Current National Developments

Training Programs

MANUFACTURING PIPELINE SECURES SUBMARINE WORKFORCE

As an eastern Connecticut manufacturing workforce initiative nears 1,000 job placements in under three years, it met a sustainability milestone — a state economic development package for its major employer partner Electric Boat included $8 million to further workforce development efforts.

Through the Eastern CT Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative, Electric Boat has hired more than 750 workers. Other workers placed in jobs landed with more than 135 other employers.

The initiative, which features outreach, assessment, training and job placement components is managed by the Eastern CT Workforce Investment Board. It was originally funded by a $6 million federal Workforce Innovation Fund grant, awarded through the Connecticut Department of Labor in September 2015.

While that grant will expire later this year, the initiative is expected to continue.

In addition to Electric Boat, the Eastern Advanced Manufacturing Alliance has been a major industry partner. A project oversight board includes other employers, organized labor, local chambers of commerce, community colleges, technical high schools and other stakeholders.

Electric Boat is a General Dynamics company that manufactures nuclear submarines. The company's main shipyard is located in Groton, where the Thames River flows into Long Island Sound.

Electric Boat is the prime contractor for the U.S. Navy's Virginia-class fast attack submarine and it is preparing to build the forthcoming, Columbia-class ballistic missile submarine.

With these projects on its plate, the company has in recent years been ramping up its workforce. It hired close to 2,000 workers in Connecticut in 2017. Electric Boat's total workforce, including facilities in Rhode Island, exceeds 15,000. That workforce is expected to grow to more than 18,000 by 2030. Like many manufacturers, the company has significant replacement needs from retirements.

Because Electric Boat works with more than 700 suppliers in the state, the submarine business has increased demand for workers by many other manufacturers in the region.

On May 1, Connecticut Gov. Dannel Malloy (D) announced an incentive package to support the company's growth.

This includes a $35 million loan for machinery and equipment purchases, $29 million in tax exemptions to support plant expansion, $20 million for dredging to allow submarine launches from a new dry dock and the $8 million workforce development grant.

"This investment provides crucial support for the workforce development and facility expansion that will help Electric Boat grow, increase its economic contribution to the region, and continue to deliver the world's most capable submarines to the U.S. Navy," company President Jeffrey Geiger said in a statement. "It will also improve our competitive position, help us to secure additional work in the future and solidify the region's title of Submarine Capital of the World."

John Beauregard, chief executive of the workforce agency, described the announcement as a validation of the Eastern CT Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative.

Using the Workforce System

"What this confirms for us is our theory of utilizing the public workforce system as a primary supplier of available talent … We needed to listen to what people were telling us and we did," he told ETR.

There have been other affirming moments. Two regional philanthropists donated $550,000 to support placements in the project's training programs.

The state legislature provided an initial $500,000 investment in the program and $1 million more for fiscal year 2019, through appropriations legislation.

Electric Boat's business ramp-up revitalized the region's manufacturing sector at a time when it was experiencing a late recovery from the Great Recession.

To that end, the manufacturing pipeline initiative focused on helping the unemployed and underemployed. These jobseekers needed training opportunities that were relatively short-term so that they could afford to participate, Beauregard explained.

Before the initiative was in place, Electric Boat and other companies were filling openings through a significant amount of on-the-job training, he added.

To meet the needs of employers and jobseekers, partners in the project developed a customized assessment process and training programs in a variety of trades, such as welding, machining, pipefitting as well as design and drafting.

The manufacturing pipeline is marketed through American Job Centers and a dedicated web portal that lets interested jobseeekers begin the intake pro-

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cess. Partners have included links to this site on their own websites, as have employers on their own jobs pages.

Close to 6,000 people signed up.

Applicants are required to participate in in-depth assessments which were designed by employers. These have been delivered at the workforce agency's career centers as well as adult education centers and community colleges.

A trades assessment gauges people's skills in shop math, occupational safety, spacial reasoning and measurement, with an additional module on welding skills for those interested in the trade.

Another assessment was developed for design and drafting jobs, covering such topics as reading comprehension, math and reasoning and blueprint reading.

Based on their performance, some jobseekers are recruited by employers, others are offered opportunities to participate in the project's training programs and some are steered toward remediation classes aimed at helping them qualify for training.

"We're not giving up on anybody. We're trying to give people as many avenues as the need to make it work," Beauregard said.

Training opportunities are offered at no cost to the jobseekers. They have been offered by several community colleges, often using the facilities of technical high schools.

The workforce agency contracts for each program that is part of the initiative, filling all of the seats offered.

These training programs typically run for 5 to 10 weeks, 6.5 hours per day, five days per week.

35 Training Cohorts

Thirty-five classes had been conducted by early May, graduating more than 500 people.

Participants are offered three stipends, of $100, $150 and $200, respectively at retention points in the programs and at completion.

The workforce agency, Electric Boat and its unions, the Metal Trades Council and Marine Draftsmen's Association, applied to have these training programs designated by the state's Office of Apprenticeship Training as a recognized preapprenticeship.

Graduates receive a certificate of preapprenticeship completion in their particular trade, issued by the state.

The manufacturing pipeline initiative also offers supports, such as mileage reimbursements and payments for work boots and other job-related necessities.

Early on during the training programs, project staff arrange interviews for participants with employers. Employers often make conditional job offers based on program completion and passage of clearance checks and drug tests.

The workforce agency's business services team works to place participants who do not find jobs this way.

Placements totaled 963 in early May and Beauregard anticipated that more than 1,000 people will have gotten jobs through the pipeline by the end of the month.

Beauregard described the in-kind support from Electric Boat and other employer partners as the "secret sauce" of this workforce initiative. Their guidance contributed to every stage of the program, particularly design of the assessment process and the curriculum used in the training programs.

"The reason this project has worked and is working is the commitment and dedication of all of the partners involved. The cooperation we received was incredible," he said.

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