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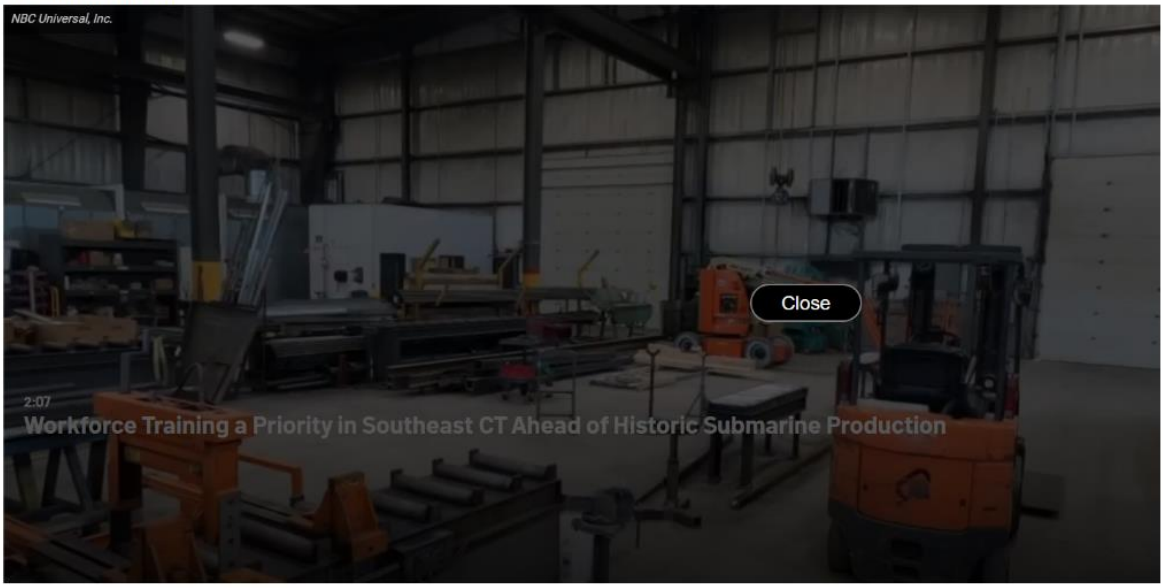
Workforce Training a Priority in Southeast CT Ahead of Historic Submarine Production

Groton-based General Dynamics Electric Boat is facing the largest amount of contracted work in the company's history.

By **Siobhan McGirl**



Thousands of manufacturing workers will be needed in southeastern Connecticut over the next decade to help with submarine production.

Thousands of manufacturing workers will be needed in southeastern Connecticut over the next decade to help with submarine production.

General Dynamics Electric Boat, based in Groton, has the largest amount of contracted work in the company's history. Over the next decade, with attrition, they will need to hire about 18,000 people. By the end of this year alone, they are planning to hire more than 2,000 people, according to a spokesperson for the company.

The boom in business will affect local suppliers as well, creating an increased demand for a skilled workforce in the region.

The Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board (EWIB) has been training workers to fill this need for several years. Their work continues.

In 2015, they started the Eastern CT Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative. The program provides no-cost training to address the hiring needs of the manufacturing industry, including Electric Boat and its local suppliers.

The initiative has placed more than 1,700 people in local manufacturing jobs.

“Getting a lot of that up front training done prior to them even starting their first day on the job, which has been very very good," explained Chris Jewell, the chairman of EWIB.

In addition to working with EWIB, Jewell is the chief financial officer of Collins and Jewell. The Bozrah-based company is a supplier for EB. Jewell said that he has hired at least 15 manufacturing pipeline graduates.

"It changed my life because at the time I just thought I was going to be stuck where I was at," said Corey Forsyth, a graduate of the program.

Forsyth entered the program three years ago with no manufacturing experience and is now working at Collins and Jewell as a manufacturing quality engineer.

Rep. Joe Courtney is the chairman of the subcommittee on seapower and projection forces, which oversees all U.S. Navy shipbuilding. He said that EWIB and the manufacturing pipeline program will continue to be critical in preparing the region's workforce for the upcoming manufacturing opportunities.

“It’s a changing labor market and it’s not just a blip. This is going to be around for a couple of decades at least," said Rep. Courtney.

EWIB has not stopped workforce training during the pandemic. Moving forward they have plans to expand, hoping to reach students at a younger age.

"We want to get to middle schools, elementary schools to have kids start thinking about this type of work earlier," said Jewell. "This is a career opportunity. This is not just another job.”