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New training program tailored to EB work holds first graduation

14 fulfill requirements of 150-hour, five-week class; hundreds express interest

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Groton — Jason Barnwell, 29, is one step closer to starting a career building Navy submarines like his father.

Barnwell intended to follow in his father's footsteps, and he spent much of the last five weeks learning the same skills his father did when he first started building submarines.

Barnwell is one of 14 graduates of a five-week training program intended to produce the skilled workers that the region's advanced manufacturing sector, namely Electric Boat, needs.

A brief, informal ceremony was held for the class on Friday in the automotive lab at Ella T. Grasso Technical High School, where they've spent 150 hours.

In 2030, EB expects to have 18,000 employees turning out both advanced nuclear attack submarines and a new class of ballistic missile submarines.

SEE GRADUATES PAGE A3

Graduates of class extended conditional offers from EB

FROM A1

More than 90 percent of that growth will be in the shipyard trades, such as welding, pipefitting and sheet metal work.

The company has looked for partners to train the workers — such as the 14 who graduated Friday — that it needs to meet its workforce demands.

The class was the first to graduate from the program, called the Outside Machinists Manufacturing Pipeline, a collaboration between several organizations and EB.

The company has extended conditional employment offers to all of the graduates.

The plan is for 450 students to undergo similar training in the next three years, according to John Beauregard, executive director of the Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board, a partner in the program.

Close to 800 people have expressed interest in the program, Beauregard said.

Barnwell was referred to the program by EB's human resources department to get initial training before starting his job, a new line of work for him. He's worked in security for about five years, most recently as a security guard at the Coast Guard Academy.

Barnwell said he feels more confident now than he did five weeks ago after learning to read blueprints, how to assemble complex parts, and about precision drilling and measuring, among other skills.

The program is funded by a three-year, $6 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. Classes offered over the course of those three years will be in different manufacturing specialties.

Students are trained for work at EB and also with members of the Eastern Advanced Manufacturing Alliance, another partner in the effort.

The program features classwork, an online component and hands-on training.

The 14 who pioneered the program come from different backgrounds and skills.

Monica Bonner, 29, has driven trucks and school buses. She's worked in home health care, retail and as a receptionist.

She said she was attracted to the manufacturing field because it's steady work with good pay. It's a challenge, and she gets to work with her hands.

While some people might not assume so, she said, it's work that involves "a lot of critical thinking."



DANA JENSEN/THE DAY

Monica Bonner, right, of New London receives a Certificate of Congressional Recognition from Avanti Grant, left, district director for U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney, D-2nd District, after she received her certificate of completion as part of the first graduating class in the Outside Machinists Manufacturing Pipeline program during a ceremony Friday in the automotive lab at the Ella T. Grasso Technical High School in Groton. Looking on is Mary Ellen Jukoski, second from left, president of Three Rivers Community College.

Bonner is the only woman in the class, which originally started with 15 students; one was removed.

Some of the students came to the six-hour classes, Monday through Friday, after working a full-time job. Some also have kids to take care of.

"There's been a lot of dedication from these guys," Bret Jackson, lead instructor, said.

The six instructors, including Jackson, also come from a variety of different backgrounds — the private sector, retired employees of EB, and the military. Jackson served 30 years in the Coast Guard.

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