The Day

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Three Rivers gets grant for Electric Boat course

Collaboration comes as company seeks welding support at Quonset Point site

By ERICA MOSER
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Norwich — Three Rivers Community College has secured a $705,000 grant from Advanced Technology International to develop and teach a welding course, with a Navy certification, to Electric Boat workers.

Erin Sullivan, acting director of noncredit programs, explained that Three Rivers works in collaboration with EB, which needs welding support at its Quonset Point site in North Kingstown, Rhode Island.

Manufacturing director Bret Jacobson explained that because Columbia-class submarines start at Quonset Point, the site in Rhode Island is hitting its surge before the Groton site.

Whereas the Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative from the Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board is designed to train the unemployed and underemployed in a variety of manufacturing jobs, and most but not all get placed at EB upon completion, this new course is specifically to train new EB hires in welding.

But it's happening at the same place as some MPI courses: The 8,500-square-foot Manufacturing Apprenticeship Center, which is housed at Ella T. Grasso and opened in 2019.

Jacobson said there was a small opening at the MAC between MPI classes, so "to utilize all of our resources that we've already purchased for the manufacturing stuff to help out Rhode Island is nice."

Jacobson said Three Rivers is scheduled to put on two welding courses under this new grant, one that's about halfway done and one scheduled to start at the end of February.

The course runs from 3 to 11:30 p.m. — being at Grasso Tech, it has

SEE THREE RIVERS PAGE D4

Three Rivers receives grant for EB course

FROM D1

to be after-school hours — for nine weeks. There are 14 people in the current class and Jacobson expects about the same number in the second.

"Most of them are completely new to welding, and just showed an aptitude for it and a strong character that Electric Boat saw in them and hired them, and we're training them up," Jacobson said, adding that "honestly, they're doing a fantastic job."

He said staff adopt and teach to EB's processes for this course.

Sullivan said the grant covers both instructional costs and equipment. Jacobson said the new equipment is a set of welders that are Navy certified, a certification Three Rivers hasn't had before and that will help put students to work sooner.

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> **BRET JACOBSON, THREE RIVERS MANUFACTURING DIRECTOR**

He said the welders should be arriving in the next couple weeks, and Grasso Tech students will be able to use them, as well.

The funder, South Carolina-based Advanced Technology International, is a nonprofit that builds research and development collaborations, and helps "move innovation from industry and academia to the Government, particularly the (Department of Defense)."

Sullivan said Three Rivers also is working with the Southeastern New England Defense Industry Alliance on this project.

She noted the grant also supports a 9-hour trade exploratory program called The Boat for Women.

"The push really is to support the nontraditional student in this area, in the field of manufacturing, so that's what we're trying to bring to the area, to the region, to increase women in the trades," Sullivan explained.

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