



July 18th, 2013
11:30am

Contact: Patricia H. Crosby,
Exec. Dir.
Franklin Hampshire
REB
fhreb@crocker.com
413-773-1835

Employment Board, College, Tech School and Manufacturers Team Up for Adult Job Training

The Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board (FHREB) and Career Centers, along with leading manufacturing companies and partners from Greenfield Community College (GCC) and Franklin County Technical School (FCTS), are teaming up to provide a twelve-week program in precision machining for unemployed and underemployed adults in the region. The \$239,351 project is funded by a Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund grant through the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development. The grant program is administered at the state level by Commonwealth Corporation.

"This program has been a long-time coming," notes **Patricia Crosby, Executive Director of the Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board**, which oversees workforce programs for the two counties and the North Quabbin region. "Ever since I started this job, I have been hearing, on the one hand, that manufacturing is dying, and on the other, that advanced manufacturing, *precision* manufacturing, is not only thriving, but employers can't find workers with the skill-levels needed to enter and advance in their companies. "

"We knew it was a need," Crosby goes on to say about the new **Middle Skills Manufacturing Initiative**, to be known as **MSMI**, "but until now we just haven't had the right combination of need, people, organizations, and dollars to make it happen. It feels like the stars are finally aligned."

Some of the stars have been manufacturing companies themselves, who, with the leadership of employers like **Steve Capshaw, CEO of VSS, Inc.**, have independently raised over \$213,000 to update the training lab at Franklin County Technical School.

Other stars include the Franklin region's legislative delegation, including Senator Stan Rosenberg, and Representatives Stephen Kulik, Denise Andrews, and Paul Mark, who were instrumental in ensuring that \$250,000 to match those private sector funds was reserved in the state budget via the Executive Office of Economic Development. In all, over a half-million in new funds will enable FCTS not only to offer top-notch precision machine training to their secondary students, but also to open the lab to adults in **MSMI** at night.

Capshaw is vehement about the need for workers capable of learning and advancing their skills in precision machining. "Right now I'm one of those turning away work for want of the right workers," says Capshaw. "That's not a position any of us wants to be in. We need more people interested in, knowledgeable about, and skilled in these jobs. Some are young people from the vocational-technical schools, but we need to cast the net wider. We know there are others out there willing to work hard for good pay, and with an aptitude and interest in this kind of work. This program will help us find them and get them started on a great career."

The Franklin Hampshire Middle Skills Manufacturing Initiative (MSMI) is the first project of the newly-established Franklin Hampshire Middle Skills Center, a collaboration of Greenfield Community College, Franklin County Technical School, and the Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board and Career Centers. Driven by the acute and persistent needs of area manufacturing companies for a stronger and more vibrant pipeline of new and experienced workers to keep pace with business and replace a rapidly-aging workforce, the project's 12-week intensive training program for unemployed/underemployed adults will be offered weekday evenings at FCTS and jointly taught by FCTS and GCC-contracted instructors from industry. The initial curriculum will include blueprint reading, math for manufacturing, metrology, and Computer-Aided Manufacturing (CAM) instruction, with a significant portion of the 220 hr. training dedicated to hands-on CNC machine applications in a lab/shop setting.

Lead Employers VSS, Inc. and Bete Fog Nozzle contributed to the training plan and curriculum design, and an additional 12 companies have signed on to support the program. Companies include Amherst Machine, Applied Dynamics, Argotec, the DuMont Company LLC, Hassay Savage Company, Mayhew Steel Products, Montague Machine, Poplar Hill Machine, L.S.Starrett, Rodney Hunt, Sisson Engineering, and SmallCorp.

Cody Sisson, CEO of Sisson Engineering and a member of the Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board, echoes Capshaw's comments. "It's hard to find the right people for this work," Sisson notes. "Tech School kids get exposed to these jobs, but who else has a chance to and how? One of the many groups we want to reach out to for this program is older young adults, people who maybe didn't take a technical school route and now wish they had because they're stuck in a job they don't like, or they don't feel like they're going anywhere."

The Franklin Hampshire REB and Career Centers will be responsible for project implementation: recruiting, assessing, enrolling, and counseling 48 participants in 4 training cycles over a three-year period. In addition to academic basics and targeted technical training, participants will receive intensive work readiness, job search, job placement services and follow-up through **Michael Baines, FHREB Project Coordinator**, and drawing on the menu of employment

preparation workshops readily available to all area job seekers through the Franklin Hampshire Career Center.

The REB will hold monthly project implementation meetings with college and voc-tech school partners, and tri-annual Project Advisory Meetings chaired by industry representatives, to assess program progress and make adjustments and improvements as needed.

A limited number of On-the-Job training opportunities, developed and overseen by FHREB staff in conjunction with employer partners, will be available for those candidates likely to benefit from more work-based experience before seeking jobs in the industry.

The Project will provide a model for Middle Skills postsecondary education programming jointly-developed and offered by the college and vocational-technical school, with the potential to be sustained well after the grant period and expanded into additional areas. GCC has already partnered consistently over the years with both FCTS and Smith Vocational Agricultural-Technical School on various community education initiatives.

As one example, in recent years FCTS and the College joined forces to establish a Clean Energy Instruction Center at FCTS, where adults from the region can pursue "MassGreen"¹ weatherization training, credentials, and jobs. **The Middle Skills Manufacturing Initiative**, or "MSMI", will afford the College the opportunity to continue working with workforce development and vocational-technical partners to identify new areas for collaboration on education/training that will help unemployed and underemployed adults in the Franklin, Hampshire and North Quabbin regions get back to work or advance in their careers.

"Until now," notes **Phyllis White, Director of Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Programs at the Franklin Hampshire Career Center**, "unemployed and dislocated workers who are interested in advanced manufacturing have to travel to Worcester, Springfield, or even Enfield, Connecticut to find training in precision machining. Anything that can be done to increase the number of training options available in our own community is really helpful to the people we work with." The Franklin Hampshire WIA region itself is investing over \$22,000 in training development funds to the project with the hope the training can be sustained into the future.

While the current training is focused on preparing students for immediate entry into jobs, partners are also exploring possibilities for eventually linking coursework to existing or new programs at the College.

"Greenfield Community College is pleased to be a partner in the creation of this new advanced manufacturing training program," says Chief Academic Officer Sher Hruska. "Special state funding and the strong working partnership between the REB, Franklin County Technical School, business leaders, and the College are at the heart of what makes this opportunity available. The priority for this current project funding is to fill training needs and business position vacancies with highly technical staff."

¹ developed by the MA Clean Energy Center and community colleges statewide.

Hruska adds that, "As the training program develops, GCC will be working with partners to explore the value of potentially adding credit-bearing options that build on what is learned through this current project. The current training program is advanced beyond high school yet less than a two-year degree."

Jim Lavery, Superintendent of Franklin County Technical School, is also excited about the opportunities the "Middle Skills" concept affords. "There's no reason why our shops and labs need to be empty after 4pm many weekdays. They are excellent training sites, and there are staff who are eager to offer their expertise, or even upgrade their own skills. We also want to give our students and their parents the message that it's good for everyone to have goals for postsecondary education and training, for lifelong learning, on their horizon. That's how you keep yourself viable in a competitive job market."

Lavery adds, "In addition to the grants and private funds, FCTS also received a \$100,000 equipment grant from the Executive Office for Administration and Finance to support this program upgrade, so this has really been team effort at the state as well as regional level."

Over 8,000 people are already employed in the manufacturing sector in the Franklin Hampshire workforce region, according to Crosby. "In Franklin County, it's 13.7% of the employed workforce," she emphasizes. "In North Quabbin, it's 21%!" Many of those workers are 55 or older and thinking about retirement, Crosby notes. "Employers are realizing it's going to take a concerted effort to ensure they have interested, energized, and technically-savvy people to take their place."

For more information about the program overall, contact Michael Baines, Project Coordinator, at the FHREB, mbaines@fhreb.com or 413-774-4361 Ext. 375. To apply, call FHCC at 413-774-4361 to register for an upcoming information session, which is the first step to enrollment. Pre-registration for information sessions is required.

###