

Opinion > Columns (/Opinion/Columns/)

My Turn — Andrew Baker: Honor our machine shop 'graduates' — Bob Pura and Rep. Kulik

By ANDREW BAKER

Wednesday, May 16, 2018

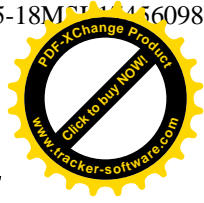
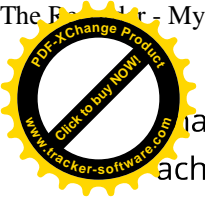
On Friday, at 4 p.m. in the Franklin County Tech School (FCTS) cafeteria, 14 adult students will say goodbye to a 12-week re-skilling training in computer numerical control (CNC) machining and set off toward new careers in precision manufacturing. There will be two other "graduates" there to congratulate the students as we honor them for achievements over long careers: Bob Pura, president of Greenfield Community College (GCC) for the past 17 years, and Stephen Kulik, state representative for the 1st Franklin District for 25 years.

The ceremony will spotlight both the accomplishments of the graduates and the work of these two men to support hands-on skill-building programs that help strengthen the Pioneer Valley economy while providing a pathway to machining careers for women and men in Franklin and Hampshire counties. I hope you'll join me in honoring them.

In 2013, area manufacturers joined together and raised over \$200,000 to modernize the tech school machine shop. With help from Rep. Kulik and the western Mass. legislative delegation, the state more than matched that amount to supplement the 1940s-era manual mills and lathes with new computer-controlled machines. High school students can now train for advanced manufacturing careers by learning the coding, programming and machining needed in a cutting edge machine shop.

Rep. Kulik then supported funding applications by the Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board (FHREB) to secure a Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund (WCTF) grant to develop a CNC machining program for adults. Working closely with local manufacturers, GCC's Workforce Development department hammered out a curriculum geared to the needs of local machine shops.

Local companies went a step further and encouraged their own employees to serve as hands-on trainers in the program. The FCTS machine shop now does double duty – training high school students by day and retraining unemployed adults and career



angers in the evening. Some CNC graduates now moonlight as instructors! That achievement reflects the hard work of a true public-private partnership between GCC, FHREB, FCTS, the Franklin Hampshire Career Center, the Literacy Project, Center for New Americans, Franklin County Sheriff's office and area manufacturers collaborating together to build a model program.

Fast -forward five years and the Manufacturing Skills Initiative (MSI) can count over 120 CNC training graduates. Participants proudly boast a 96 percent completion rate and an 84 percent job placement rate. Follow on state grants have helped to keep the CNC training tuition-free for the adult students, helping them up to jobs starting at \$15 to \$20 and hour.

In his final semester at GCC, President Pura is working hard to ensure the ongoing success of the MSI program. Together with FHREB Director, Patricia Crosby, he is going back to all the area manufacturers and raising contributions to a Manufacturing Training Fund that will help maintain a pipeline of skilled workers in the years ahead. Rep. Kulik, President Pura and our area manufacturers have led the way in demonstrating how effective partnerships for economic development can be forged and sustained. Stop by on May 18 and thank them.

Andrew Baker is the Special Projects Coordinator for the Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board. He provides job coaching for CNC trainees and keeps manufacturers closely engaged in MSI programs.
