

ECONOMY

Training for success

Monroe's summer programs to boost interest in advanced manufacturing

By Erin Cain
ecain@messengerpostmedia.com

Michael Mance, a 23-year Navy veteran, is looking to enter the workforce after being retired for 10 years.

Having experience as an aviation electronic technician, he began his job search in that field, but found there were much more openings for CNC, or computer numerical control, operators than electronic technicians.

That was when Mance, of Spencerport, decided to switch directions. His Veterans Affairs counselor told him about an accelerated machining training program at Monroe Community College. He applied and was accepted.

"It looked very interesting, so I applied for it," he said, adding that machining has always fascinated him.

His goal, after the program, he said, is to get a job as a CNC operator.

Perception problem

The machining program is one of several programs being offered this summer at MCC to get more people trained in careers in advanced manufacturing, a field where industry experts say vacancies are

going unfilled because of a lack of trained workers.

"This is a national problem," said Thomas Battley, executive director of the Rochester Regional Photonics Cluster, which includes over 80 optics, photonics and imaging companies in the region, employing about 15,000. "Every company in this industry is facing a shortage."

This comes at a time when the unemployment rate in New York state and nationally is over 8 percent, according to the latest statistics from the Department of Labor. Rochester is a leader in the field, said Battley, and these companies create products that are used in a wide range of industries, everything from automotive to aerospace to

medical. "Most of our companies end up in these products, but people don't know about it," Battley said.

He added that the majority of people in the industry are Baby Boomers who are and will be retiring, leaving vacancies. Because of this, opportunities abound for trained workers to enter and excel in these fields.

"In this industry, if you have the aptitude, you can do anything," Battley said.

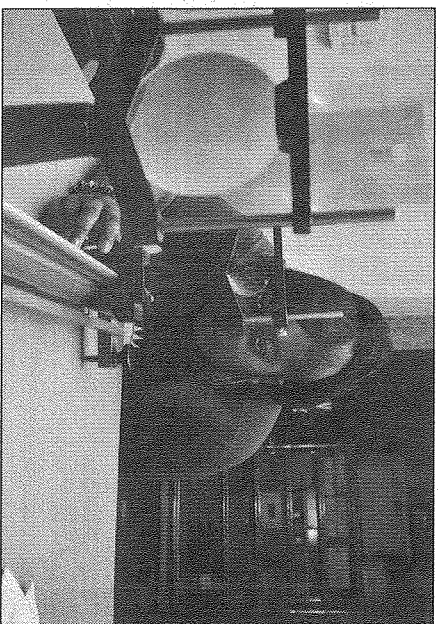
There has been a drop-off in students pursuing advanced manufacturing careers, in part because there is a perception across the country that the industry is declining, said Todd Oldham, vice president of MCC's Economic Development and Innovative Workforce Services.

"It's absolutely not dead," he said. "It is alive, and we need workers. ... We're talking a 21st-century work environment that is extremely high-tech."

Insight into industry

This summer, Oldham is overseeing several programs at MCC that are designed to help fill the void by getting more people interested in advanced manufacturing.

"There are many good careers available," he said. "We're providing them with a better and more accurate understanding of



Tishara Reddick, of Gates, works on an optics project based on Snell's Law, at MCC's Summer Optics Sizzler. PHOTOS BY SETH BINNIK/MESSENGER POST MEDIA

these fields."

Among the programs being offered are accelerated training programs in machining and optics for unemployed and underemployed residents. Following the training, participants, including Mance, are prepared to be hired in their fields, said Oldham.

MCC is also hosting two programs, the Summer Optics Sizzler and the Summer Work Experience for Youth, both of which are designed to teach Rochester-area students about opportunities in advanced manufacturing, in the areas of optics and precision machining. The programs combine hands-on classroom instruction with tours of company work sites to learn more about careers in those fields.

"They are immersive learning opportunities for the students," said Oldham.

Tishara Reddick is going into 12th grade in the fall at Gates-Chili. She took part in the Summer Optics Sizzler because "she just liked the idea of working with different types of glasses."

"I'm keeping my options open for a career," she said. She is also interested in breaking into a traditionally male field.

"The fact that there are not a lot of women is kind of crazy because there are so many jobs out there,"

she said.

Jamar Morehead, going into 12th grade at East High School, also took part in the Summer Optics Sizzler to explore his career options. He is interested in mechanical engineering, but also took an optics class last school year and enjoyed that it required a lot of science and math.

He plans to attend MCC after graduating and hopes the summer program helps him, he said, "to really get skills so next year, if I take another optics class, I will be better at it."

Teaming up

MCC has joined forces with leaders in the industry for each of its programs.

"It's a great example of industry and education coming together to support the workforce needs of the community," said Oldham.

The programs, he said, are mutually beneficial for the college and the local industry. MCC gets more people interested in pursuing education in those fields, while filling a need for workers locally.

"There is a large number of job seekers in the Rochester region who already have an aptitude for this type of work," said Battley. But, they are lacking the training. That is why, Battley said, he decided to get involved with the Summer Optics Sizzler and the optics job-readiness training programs at MCC.

Kevin Kelley, the executive director of the Rochester Technology and Manufacturing Association, is involved with the Summer Work Experience for Youth.

He said the program will educate students on the career opportunities available for them, and he hopes to continue the program every summer for as long as possible.

"Some of these places are just superior places to work," he said. "The opportunity is strong."

About the programs

Monroe Community College is offering several programs this summer designed to help more people pursue careers in advanced manufacturing. Here's a breakdown of the programs:

Summer Optics Sizzler:

The program, held June 25 to 28, was designed to inspire high school students to pursue careers in advanced manufacturing. Thirty students from East and Gates Chili high schools explored the science of optics by designing various experiments under the guidance of industry professionals and educators. They also toured company work sites and learned about local college degree programs and career paths in optics. Upon completion of the camp, students were prepared to apply for summer internships at participating companies.

Machining/CNC and Optics Fabrication Job-

Readiness Training Programs: The programs in machining, held July 2 to Aug. 23 and optics held July 9 to Aug. 16, provide accelerated technical education and hands-on training to unemployed and underemployed residents who have at least a high school diploma or equivalent. A bout 30 individuals in the nine-county region have been selected to participate. Upon completion of the program, they are eligible for hire by regional employers. Training is provided at no cost to the participants.

Summer Work Experience for Youth:

Held July 16 to Aug. 24, the program aims to expose Rochester students ages 16 to 20 to occupations in precision machining. Students become familiar with the tools and processes of manual metal fabrication through classroom instruction, hands-on lab projects and visits to company work sites.

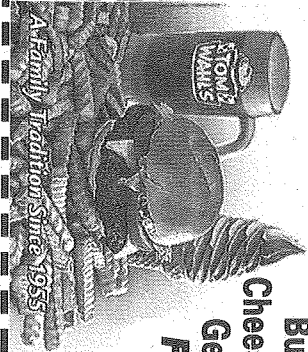
On the Web

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