

Pittsburgh nonprofit to bring machinist training program to EWCTC next year

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As the demand for machinists in southwestern Pennsylvania continues to grow, a Pittsburgh based nonprofit is doing its part to fill the void.

New Century Careers plans to add its Manufacturing 2000 (M2K) program at Eastern Westmoreland Career and Technology Center (EWCTC) in Derry Township early next year. Implementation of the adult-only program is expected to begin in February 2019.

The program, which was formed in the late 1990s out of a vo-tech school, currently offers M2K training at its Training Innovation Center on Pittsburgh's South Side. It is expanding to Westmoreland County because of the demand for jobs in the industry.

At Wednesday's EWCTC Joint Area Board meeting, New Century President and CEO Paul Anselmo said the area demand is based on several factors, including: Rising skill requirements for manufacturing companies to remain competitive, an aging workforce retiring or about to retire, job creation tied to good economic conditions and a limited pipeline to find new workers.

To point out this demand, Anselmo cited an email he sent to a group of companies three years ago: He got 75 responses, who determined there was a need for roughly 360 machinists, or about five per company.

"There are about 800 companies in our area that hire machinists and if only 25 percent of them had similar needs, that would be 900 new machinists in just one year, so you can see the scale of the problem we're facing," he said. "There's just great demand in manufacturing for skilled workers."

Added EWCTC Administrative Director Todd Weimer: "It is one of the highest-demand sectors in business and industry here. There is a strong demand for machinists and we want to do our part by building a pipeline (for jobs)."

The short-term pre-apprenticeship program is offered at no cost to qualified job-seekers. New Century recruits, screens, tests, trains and places high school graduates age 18 and older in entry-level machinist jobs that often lead to positions with family-sustaining wages.

Manufacturing, include machining, is the second-largest source of private sector employment in the region. The average annual wage for machinists in southwestern Pennsylvania is \$40,130, according to the 2013 PA Career Guide, with the majority of the positions not requiring a college degree.

During the first 16 months of the program, New Century will recruit, screen, test and train approximately 33 individuals from both the Derry Township and Pittsburgh sites for machining jobs. Potential students are screened for their aptitude to learn, including those with pre-existing education and employment barriers.

There are three phases of the program, which range from 250 to 600 hours of training. Those who don't find jobs deep into the training process can take credential tests under National Institute for Metalworking Skills guidelines.

In all, trainees can gain experience using saws, drill presses, lathes, pedestal and surface grinders, and vertical milling and CNC machines.

"It comes in three levels," Anselmo said. "We can train to a little bit, a medium level or a lot. Different companies have different levels they are interested in. We organized this in such a way that anybody (in the program) can get training started."

"If you want to hire somebody sooner, great. But if you want to wait, you might not get a chance because (another company) might pick them up sooner," he said. "The demand is what drives this thing, and there's a lot of demand."

Enrollment and training is held year-round. Generally, training is completed between eight and 30 weeks with daytime and evening options.

"An advantage of the M2K program for both workers in need of jobs and employers with immediate and critical gaps in filling positions is its ability to train and place workers in the manufacturing workforce within as few as four months," Anselmo said.

Individuals who have done the training come from a wide range of backgrounds. A newspaper article earlier this year said a New Century group at the South Side site included a man who had lived in a halfway house, a former real estate agent and a 20-something who dropped out of business school.

"It provides an opportunity for adults in our community — maybe under-employed, maybe unemployed — to get the training they could have had in high school and get it for free," Weimer said.

State grant funds are needed to get the program going at EWCTC, Weimer said. He added that grant funds, if acquired, will also be used to purchase a machine for the school.

Anselmo said New Century has nearly 80 manufacturing partners and expects to hire three to five partners in eastern Westmoreland County within the next few months.

"The partner company part of it is, if you hire somebody, you pay a small fee," he said. "It doesn't pay what the training costs, but it helps put skin in the game. Most companies look at it as a no-brainer."

New Century hopes to sustain the program locally longterm through community and industry partnerships.

Those interested in training at the Pittsburgh or Derry Township sites can find more details by visiting www.ncsquared.com or calling 1-800-822-9337, option 3.