

## Demand high for employees in manufacturing

The hands of machinists, welders and others involved in the manufacturing industry have built America. While there are those that would claim careers in manufacturing are in decline, experts in the field know otherwise and are adamant that high-technology manufacturing is playing an increasingly important role in the future of our country's economic growth and ability to compete in a global marketplace.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, a significant number of manufacturing jobs will become available in the future. Manufacturers will continually be seeking to hire more highly skilled workers, especially those with good basic educational skills who, in turn, generally make good candidates for further training in the desired skills for jobs of twenty-first century manufacturing. Workers with these skills are expected to experience excellent job prospects.

"Recent myths that manufacturing is dying or moving off shore are simply untrue," says Dr. Bob Meyer, special assistant to the chancellor for state and federal relations; director, Stout Technology Transfer Institute, Wisconsin. "By busting these myths, we hope to attract more people into the wonderful careers that are available in manufacturing. A stable, well-educated workforce is exactly what will help our manufacturers thrive and become more innovative and competitive in the future."

In fact, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, manufacturing careers average more than \$44,000, not including benefits – the highest paying career in the private sector. Manufacturers are responsible for almost two-thirds of all private sector research and development. Every dollar spent in manufacturing goods generates an additional \$1.43 of additional economic activity – more than any other economic sector. The number of exported manufactured goods has doubled over the past 10 years to 63 percent. These impressive accomplishments are credit to the hard work of people in the trade.

Manufacturing is an industry full of bright and dynamic



*In recognition of May being Manufacturing Month, WITC-Ashland will host a Machine Tool Operation Open House from 4 to 6 p.m., Thursday, May 1. For more information, see the full announcement on page 8.*

individuals who understand and embrace the latest innovations in control systems, micro-machining, computer-aided design and other technologies that push the limits of the manufacturing industry. These workers are creative thinkers with applied/hands-on abilities to solve problems and get things done.

Yet keeping this industry strong is not an easy task. Gold Collar Careers, an organization comprised of business and educational partners, is dedicated to increasing awareness about manufacturing careers within Northwest and Northcentral Wisconsin. In an effort to promote career paths in the manufacturing industry, the group has taken its message to malls, movie theaters and placed articles in local newspaper. Gold Collar Careers also works with middle and high schools sharing information about manufacturing related careers, and providing presentations at other community and professional

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events. This information promotes an understanding of the impact manufacturing has on Wisconsin.

"Gold Collar Careers is a grass-roots organization with membership from both the manufacturing community and the public sector," says Meyer. "We are working together to let people know that manufacturing is alive and well in Wisconsin, is growing in sophistication, offers many challenging high technology careers, and is an exciting part of the economy to work in."

Gold Collar Careers took shape following the Sept. 11 tragedy and the economic downturn that followed. While the manufacturing industry experienced a slowdown, which resulted in the loss of some low skill jobs, dynamic growth in high tech, sophisticated manufacturing jobs was taking place. Unfortunately, the job gains in highly skilled manufacturing was overshadowed by the losses of the low-tech, low-wage manufacturing jobs.

"Contrary to what the general public thought, manufacturing was growing rather than contracting," Meyer says. "But the incorrect perception that manufacturing was in decline convinced many people to avoid career paths in manufacturing."

Enrollments in manufacturing related programs at Chippewa Valley Technical College, the University of Wisconsin-Stout and Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College suffered as a result. Soon manufacturers had great difficulty finding graduates that possessed the high tech skills they were looking for.

"Gold Collar Careers set its focus on this problem and began touting the strength of the manufacturing sector and the great career paths that are available in manufacturing," Meyer says. "We are working very hard to change the incorrect perceptions of manufacturing that are out there and have had some great success with these efforts. Many of the manufacturing related educational

programs at our technical colleges and universities in the region have rebounded nicely. This rebound will help grow the type of skilled workforce that is so critical to area manufacturers."

Yet Gold Collar Careers is not the only organization in Wisconsin dedicated to promoting the manufacturing industry. The Northwest Wisconsin Manufacturing Outreach Center is a partnership between five technical colleges in Northwest Wisconsin.



"Another outstanding group that I've been proud to work with is the Northwest Wisconsin Manufacturing Outreach Center," Meyer says. "The NWMOC provides strategic planning, new product development, and Lean Manufacturing services to manufacturers in the region. They also provide training and technical assistance to help our manufacturers implement strategies that allow them to operate

more efficiently, grow their bottom line, and compete in the global marketplace."

The NWMOC has already proved to be a strong asset for manufacturers in Northwest Wisconsin. Last year, NWMOC clients reported impacts exceeding \$90 million for the transformational training and implementation services that they received from the center.

In Wisconsin, the manufacturing industry contributes significantly to the state's financial stability, comprising almost half of Wisconsin's economy. Nearly 1 in 5 workers in Wisconsin are directly employed in some form of manufacturing.

"The manufacturing industry in Wisconsin is very strong and vibrant," Meyer says. "By several measures, including number of employees and gross state product, manufacturing accounts for about 25 percent of Wisconsin's economy and is the source of many of our highest paying jobs in the state. Therefore, it is especially important that we do what we can to maintain its strength."