

Pittsburgh Business Times - June 20, 2005

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## PITTSBURGH BUSINESS TIMES

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### IN DEPTH: MANUFACTURING

From the June 17, 2005 print edition

## Nonprofits promote machining careers by dispelling myths

Want to ensure manufacturers have skilled work force in future

[Tracy Carbasho](#)

Local manufacturing leaders are taking the first step toward creating an ongoing supply of skilled workers by dispelling the misguided images of the industry.

"Companies are growing and jobs are open, but there aren't enough people to fill the positions," said Greg Chambers, manager of environmental, health, safety and training at [Oberg Industries Inc.](#) in Freeport.

"There's still that negative connotation of a hot, miserable work environment, but today's manufacturing industry is 180 degrees different than what most people think. You can almost go to work in a suit and tie."

Oberg Industries, which employs nearly 500 people, provides precision machining and manufacturing services. Mr. Chambers said improving public awareness is the key to convincing more young people that manufacturing can be a good career choice. Company representatives conduct plant tours and visit local schools on a regular basis.

Mr. Chambers calls on New Century Careers, a Downtown work force development organization, when he needs to recruit skilled workers or obtain training for incumbent employees. NCC and the Pittsburgh chapter of the National Tooling and Machining Association, which supports the custom precision manufacturing industry, established a strategic partnership in 2004.

The nonprofit organizations are working to develop educational opportunities and a support system to enhance the competitiveness of manufacturers.

"Our mission is to ensure that manufacturers have the skilled work force necessary to survive," said Barry Maciak, president of NCC. "It's important to let people know that manufacturing is not only a good place to make a living, but it also offers incredible opportunities for growth where you can go from sweeping floors to being a company president."

Robert Kettering, president of the Pittsburgh chapter of the NTMA, is a perfect example of how an individual can ascend to management status in the manufacturing arena. He began working at [Dura-Metal Products Corp.](#), an Irwin company that provides material fabrication services, as an entry-level machine tool operator in 1974 and now serves as the corporation's manufacturing manager.

"The next 20 years will be dominated by technical-type jobs, or gold-collar jobs, requiring trade or technical education," said Mr. Kettering.

The U.S. Department of Labor projects that 39 percent of the available industry jobs in 2006 will require on-the-job training, while 38 percent will require a two-year associate's degree and 23 percent will require a bachelor's degree or higher.

Since 1997, NCC has trained more than 600 machinists and welders, 70 percent of whom obtained employment with companies in Western Pennsylvania. During those eight years, more than 160 companies of all sizes throughout the region have partnered with NCC, which has a training facility on the South Side, to find high-quality workers or to improve the skills of their existing work force.

The training is especially important in light of statistics from the Pennsylvania Department of Labor that show there are more than 4,000 manufacturing companies located in the nine-county region of southwestern Pennsylvania. The companies employ a combined total of approximately 177,000 workers, but 10 percent of the local machinists will retire every year for the next decade. Fifteen percent of the work force is already over the age of 55.

Metalworking is the region's largest manufacturing group, accounting for more than 40 percent of all jobs in the local industry with 63,000 individuals working at 1,632 plants. Machining and welding skills are at the heart of the metalworking field.

A study conducted in late 2004 by the Center for Workforce Development at [Duquesne University](#) in conjunction with NCC showed there were 2,560 job vacancies in the manufacturing sector of southwestern Pennsylvania. Even more surprising are numbers from the [National Association of Manufacturers](#) in McLean, Va., which show there could be a nationwide shortage of approximately 13 million skilled manufacturing employees by 2020.

"These are skilled positions, so you can't take someone off the street or someone with basic manufacturing experience and put them into these positions," said Mr. Maciak. "We need to continually upgrade the way we deliver manufacturing training."

Phil Weihl, vice president of value business systems and lean enterprise at [Kennametal Inc.](#) in Latrobe, said the tooling and machining industry demands skilled machinists, engineers, technicians, metallurgists, managers and other personnel.

Kennametal is a global supplier of tooling, engineered components and advanced materials used in production processes.

"As fewer people enter this industry, we are faced with fewer applicants for open positions," said Mr. Weihl. "It is vitally important to the future of U.S. manufacturing that we continue to prepare, train and attract qualified personnel into these positions."

Phyllis Miller, human resources manager at [Hamill Manufacturing Co.](#) in Trafford, said NTMA's annual apprentice competition is an excellent way to showcase the tooling and machining industry. Hamill specializes in precision machining, welding and fabrication of complex components for a variety of industries.

Wayne Sumpman, a machinist at Hamill, won this year's regional NTMA competition and earned fourth place at the national level.

"The news media continues to publicize information about jobs lost to other countries, but doesn't publicize our need to maintain manufacturing in America," said Ms. Miller, who chairs the local NTMA's Apprenticeship Steering Committee.

"We feel apprenticeships offer a viable alternative to college for many students. They don't need college degrees to become machinists, but they do need high-level math skills. Unfortunately, it's difficult to get the word out to the public, so we see competitions as a way to showcase the expertise needed to be a machinist."

State and federal officials have responded to the need for additional skills training by providing grants to support local efforts. The U.S. Department of Labor awarded a \$3.75 million grant earlier this month to the [Pennsylvania Workforce Investment Board](#) to prepare workers for jobs in advanced manufacturing.

In April, Gov. Ed Rendell provided a \$400,000 grant to the Manufacturing Industry Partnership of Southwestern Pennsylvania to support training programs for incumbent workers.

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