

Manufacturing Pre-Apprenticeship Certificate will help trainees land a job

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(Butler, PA) Butler County Community College's Manufacturing Pre-Apprenticeship Certificate will reduce a shortage of skilled candidates and allow students to network with potential employers, says Scott Covert, training coordinator with Penn United Technologies Inc. in Cabot.

The program is free to students who meet requirements through a grant funded by the Tri-County Workforce Investment Board.

Penn United and BC3 will instruct the 150-hour program from 8:00 a.m. to noon Mondays through Thursdays from Feb. 13 through April 17. Students will develop entry-level skills needed to begin a career as a machine operator; or as a machinist, quality control or computer numerical control apprentice; or as an assembler, or in maintenance or in other positions.

"This is for those who are unemployed, underemployed, needing basic skills," says Kelly Jordan, coordinator of professional education and certificate programs at BC3. "There is kind of a range of people who come in to this, such as students who graduated and don't have a direction academically, but are interested in this type of environment. It gives them the skills to walk in the door and say, 'Hey, I've got training in manufacturing.'"

It will also put their application on top of the stack, Covert says, adding that the BC3 certification in basic shop safety and blueprint reading, hand and electronic measuring instruments and quality processes and procedures, among other skills, "is going to save the employer some training."

Butler County leader in Pennsylvania manufacturing

With 12,360, Butler County had the fourth-highest number of manufacturing employees among 41 Pennsylvania counties west of the Susquehanna River in June, according to the most recent statistics available from the state Department of Labor and Industry.

Average weekly earnings for manufacturing workers in Butler County were \$1,183, the second-highest west of the Susquehanna River. There are more than 280 manufacturers in Butler County engaged in the mechanical, physical, or chemical transformation of materials, substances, or components into new products, according to the state Department of Labor and Industry.

"Although we all do different things, there is a certain set of core skills that we would like our entry-level employees to have," Covert says. "And those would be the skills that we teach in this course."

Entry-level skills that, Covert says, have become rare.

“In the 1990s, when we did a lot of off-shoring and manufacturing went overseas to try to save a buck, there weren’t a lot of new manufacturing jobs available for people coming out of school,” Covert says. “Manufacturing is coming back in America bigger and better than ever, but we had that gap when we weren’t sending anyone into manufacturing. We have the baby boomers who are getting ready to retire in the next few years, and we have a shortage of people who are skilled to backfill them.”

Pew Research Center projects 10,000 people will turn 65 every day for the next 15 years.

“That’s 10,000 people a day who can be retiring,” Covert says. “That’s staggering.”

Mary Salony, whose Tri-County Workforce Investment Board grant is funding the Manufacturing Pre-Apprenticeship Certificate, hears from employers in Butler, Armstrong and Indiana counties about the need for candidates who possess such workplace knowledge.

“They need to hire people who have basic skills,” says Salony, director of planning and grant coordination. “Employers need employees who have a basic understanding of manufacturing and know what they are going in to, to understand the basic processes. These classes give the skills and broader-based information about manufacturing.”

Employers may attend sessions, interview students

The workplace certificate program is one of eight currently offered by BC3, says Jordan, who adds that employers are welcome to contact her if interested in attending the sessions at Penn United, 799 North Pike Road, and meeting with potential candidates. Employers, she says, can interview students during the training.

“I just got off the phone with another employer who is interested in the people in the class right now,” Covert says. “Employers are also excited about this. They realize the skills and the certification that come with this course.”

To be eligible for the free program, a student must pass a drug screening and a certified background check, complete a vocational screening assessment and possess a high school diploma or its equivalency. Students will also learn OSHA 10 - the recognition, avoidance, abatement and prevention of safety and health hazards in workplaces - and employability skills. They will have the opportunity to earn two National Institute for Metalworking Skills (NIMS) and three National Tooling and Machining Association (NTMA) credentials.

The noncredit Manufacturing Pre-Apprenticeship Certificate can lead not only to employment, but can be applied toward BC3’s 17-credit Basic Manufacturing Workplace Certificate, Jordan says.

“We’ll take that as credits toward this program and it gives students some advancement,” Jordan says. “It’s definitely a nice path. They can go into the workforce or they can continue their education with these credentials.”

BC3 “in touch” with industry needs

Covert and Salony laud BC3’s dedication to the region’s economic needs.

“That is a place where a community college can be so valuable to a community, and especially one like BC3, which is very in tune with what is going on,” Covert says. “BC3 takes great pains and great measures to make sure they are in touch with what’s going on with the industry in their area.”

BC3 certificates are important, Salony says, “because they can also be taken with you to another job, another location and it is important for those folks to have those nationally recognized credentials. It’s third-party recognition that you have those skills, and that is our goal, to fill jobs that are out there and to provide training where it is needed.”

For more information, contact Kelly Jordan at 724-287-8711, ext. 8171.