

BC3's first apprenticeship summit could help bridge skills gap

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Lisa Wilbert, of Butler, uses dial calipers as part of Butler County Community College's grant-funded, noncredit Manufacturing Pre-Apprenticeship Certificate program, which is registered through the state Department of Labor & Industry and free to eligible participants. Programs begin March 25 at BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing, New Castle; June 3 on BC3's main campus in Butler Township and at BC3 @ LindenPointe in Hermitage; and Aug. 12 at BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing. BC3 will hold its first apprenticeship summit on April 17.

(Butler, PA) Butler County Community College's first apprenticeship summit intends to create awareness about the value of trade unions' and manufacturers' registered training programs, and is designed to appeal to job-seekers, high school juniors and seniors, and to small- to mid-sized companies seeking to begin their own registered program or utilize resources provided by others, a BC3 administrator said.

“We are told a lot of employers have anywhere from 10 to 50 job openings at any given time,” said Lisa Campbell, BC3’s dean of Workforce Development. “One of the reasons for their shortages is that they cannot find skilled laborers.”

Eric Ramsay, director of the state Department of Labor & Industry’s apprenticeship and training office, will be the featured speaker at the free apprenticeship summit, scheduled for 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. April 17 in Founders Hall on BC3’s main campus in Butler Township.

The manufacturing sector employed the second-highest number of workers in Butler, Lawrence and Mercer counties, and the third-highest in Armstrong County as of January, according to the state Center for Workforce Information and Analysis.

Yet, “Manufacturers continue to struggle to find qualified candidates to join their skilled workforce,” said Neil A. Ashbaugh, director of services, New Century Careers, a workforce development and career placement training center in Pittsburgh. “Factoring into this is a perception that the only way to get into a high-skilled, high-paying job is through formal two- and four-year degree educations.”



Brandon Cornetti, of Butler, uses a vertical mill as part of Butler County Community College’s grant-funded, noncredit Manufacturing Pre-Apprenticeship Certificate program, which is registered through the state Department of Labor & Industry and free to eligible participants. Programs begin March 25 at BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing, New Castle; June 3 on BC3’s main campus in Butler Township and at BC3 @ LindenPointe in Hermitage; and Aug. 12 at BC3 @ Lawrence Crossing. BC3 will hold its first apprenticeship summit on April 17.

Entry-level “most difficult to fill”

A regional employment demand study conducted last fall by Catalyst Connection, Pittsburgh, which provides consulting and training services to small manufacturers, revealed that “Small and medium-sized manufacturers have thousands of current open positions,” said Petra Mitchell, Catalyst Connection’s president and CEO.

“Entry-level seems to be the most difficult to fill, with employers noting that in some cases they are screening 20 candidates for every position they fill,” Mitchell said. “On the other hand, this is

good news for job seekers, who can enter into a career pathway as an entry-level worker, with basic employability and mechanical aptitude skills, and be on their way to a high-paying job.”

The apprenticeship summit – sponsored by BC3 and the Tri-County Workforce Investment Board – also reflects an objective in BC3’s 2017-2022 strategic plan, Campbell said.

“We see this as an opportunity,” Campbell said, “to inform our community about apprenticeships, the different types of apprenticeships with the trade unions and with our other industry partners that have in-house union programs, as well as opportunities for our small to mid-sized businesses to learn how they too can have an apprenticeship program as a small company.”

In-house registered apprenticeship programs allow employers to use the training to recruit new workers, Ashbaugh said, adding that “because employers are investing in their employees, employers that have a registered apprenticeship program have higher retention rates.”

Conversely, by joining a group-sponsored apprenticeship program, “an employer can gain all of the benefits of an in-house program without the administrative burdens of designing, registering and reporting on their apprenticeship program,” Mitchell said.

“A career for the rest of their lives”

Those who attend can also learn about educational providers that offer training, such as Penn United Technologies, Cabot; New Century Careers; Catalyst Connection; and BC3, which offers a grant-funded, noncredit Manufacturing Pre-Apprenticeship Certificate, registered through the state Department of Labor & Industry and free to eligible participants; and a 17-credit Basic Manufacturing Workplace Certificate.

The apprenticeship summit may appeal to “the in-school and out-of-school youth, those 18- to 24-year-olds who are looking for jobs or an alternative to a four-year education,” Campbell said. “They should learn that they have opportunities to earn an apprenticeship certificate, to gain skills and an education that will allow them to earn and have a very good living.”

Paul Reinert agrees.

The director of training of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local Union No. 5 said those who complete apprenticeships will “have a career for the rest of their lives that provides for themselves and their families.”

Apprenticeship summit guests can network and visit vendors from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Ramsay, whose office’s goals are to increase the number of apprentices statewide, educate the uninformed about the merits of registered apprenticeships and expand into the nontraditional areas of apprenticeships, will speak from 6 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

“(Ramsay) can give his apprenticeship overview to job-seekers and small- to mid-sized companies,” Campbell said. “He knows the overlap that both audiences need to hear. For small companies that may be unaware of apprenticeship opportunities, the state is going to be here as well to say, ‘This is what we can do to help you.’”

Ashbaugh will moderate a panel discussion and question-and-answer session from 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Joining Reinert as a trade apprenticeship panelist will be Nick Kappas, recruiter, Steamfitters Local 449; and Steven D. Columbus, administrative manager, Operating Engineers Apprenticeship Program.

Industry apprenticeships panelists will be Allison Emsurak, human resource administrator, Cygnus Manufacturing Co., Saxonburg; Scott Covert, training coordinator, Penn United Technologies Inc.; and Mitchell.

Western Pennsylvania Operating Engineers, New Alexandria; Western Pennsylvania Laborers, Saxonburg; Oberg Industries, Sarver; and the Keystone Development Partnership, Pittsburgh; will join the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Steamfitters, Penn United Technologies, Cygnus Manufacturing Co., Catalyst Connection, New Century Careers, the apprenticeship and training office of the state Department of Labor & Industry, and BC3 as vendors.

Guests can visit vendor booths again from 7:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Visit bc3.edu/industry to RSVP.

RSVP is suggested, but not required.