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SPOTLIGHT ECONOMY

Training for success

Monroe's summer programs to boost interest in advanced manufacturing



Tyshara Reddick, of Gates, works on an optics project based on Snell's Law, at MCC's Summer Optics Sizzler.
SETH BINNIX/MESSENGER POST MEDIA

By Erinn Cain
ecain@messengerpostmedia.com

Michael Mance, a 23-year Navy veteran, is looking to enter the workforce after being retired for 10 years.

Having experience as an aviation electronic technician, he began his job search in that field, but found there were much more openings for CNC, or computer numerical control, operators than electronic technicians.

That was when Mance, of Spencerport, decided to switch directions. His Veterans Affairs counselor told him about an accelerated machining training program at Monroe Community College. He applied and was accepted.

"It looked very interesting, so I applied for it," he said, adding that machining has always fascinated him.

By the numbers

8.6 Unemployment rate for New York state, May 2012

8.2 Unemployment rate for United States, May 2012

8.5 Unemployment rate for New York state, April 2012

8.1 Unemployment rate for New York state, May 2011
Source: New York State Department of Labor

His goal, after the program, he said, is to get a job as a CNC operator.

Perception problem

The machining program is one of several programs being offered this summer at MCC to get more people trained in careers in advanced manufacturing, a field where industry experts say vacancies are going unfilled because of a lack of trained workers.

"This is a national problem," said Thomas Battley, executive director

of the Rochester Regional Photonics Cluster, which includes over 80 optics, photonics and imaging companies in the region, employing about 15,000. "Every company in this industry is facing a shortage."

This comes at a time when the unemployment rate in New York state and nationally is over 8 percent, according to the latest statistics from the Department of Labor.

Rochester is a leader in the field, said Battley, and these companies create

products that are used in a wide range of industries, everything from automotive to aerospace to medical.

"Most of our companies end up in these products, but people don't know about it," Battley said.

He added that the majority of people in the industry are Baby Boomers who are and will be retiring, leaving vacancies. Because of this, opportunities abound for trained workers to enter and excel in these fields.

"In this industry, if you have the aptitude, you can do anything," Battley said.

There has been a drop-off in students pursuing advanced manufacturing careers, in part because there is a perception across the country that the industry is declining, said Todd Oldham, vice president of MCC's Economic Development

SEE OPTICS, A9