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THIS WEEK



Ty Stewart has opened doors for students coordinating study abroad opportunities.

A winning strategy to fill jobs, spur N.Y. economy

By ANNE KRESS and JIM SYDOR
Rochester Business Journal
October 12, 2012

Stefan Sydor Optics in Chili owns at least \$4 million worth of new high-tech equipment, an investment it completed last year to better meet its global customers' changing needs for precision optics. Since then, business has continued to climb and the company wants to expand, but the shortage of skilled workers is hampering its growth.

As a longtime partner of Sydor Optics, Monroe Community College is grappling with a different challenge: It is not producing enough graduates to fulfill the workforce demands of advanced manufacturing employers in the region, despite its accelerated job-training programs and the steady increase in enrollment in its optics program over the past two years.

Now, with \$14.6 million in federal funds for a new statewide job-training initiative that MCC will lead, the tide is about to turn.

The Training and Education in Advanced Manufacturing Educational Pathways Project partners 30 SUNY community colleges with hundreds of employers and trade groups across the state, including Sydor Optics, to help displaced workers and unemployed military veterans get the training and credentials they need for high-wage, high-tech jobs within the manufacturing industry in two years or less.

Taking a public-private partnership approach, the TEAM initiative capitalizes on the strengths of each school, employer and region in a collective effort to bolster the workforce pipeline and re-energize the state's economy.

Led by MCC, the consortium of community colleges will jointly develop uniform core and specialty curricula, including fast-track coursework, that meet local industry needs and reflect industry standards. Coupled with access to online learning and relevant support services, it will build educational pathways that lead to a degree or certificate in advanced manufacturing and a certificate in a subspecialty, including optics and nanotechnology, so that students can bring diverse skills to the workplace.

The curricula also will prepare students for certification exams that lead to industry-recognized credentials.

But their education and training don't have to end there. These valuable credentials will enable graduates to continue their education as they seek to advance or move laterally within an organization.

The Manufacturers Alliance of New York and the Manufacturers Association of Central New York, along with other industry associations and employers across the state, will be involved from project design to implementation to placement and employment for eligible workers. They will serve as key partners to validate curricula, develop and implement learn-and-earn strategies, raise awareness of the industry sector, and facilitate job placement.

The curricula will be replicated across the SUNY community colleges and

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industry sectors in counties stretching from Erie in Western New York to Suffolk on Long Island. Job training is anticipated to start next year. The goal of the initiative is to serve at least 3,000 of New York's Trade Adjustment Assistance-eligible individuals and unemployed veterans and connect them to employers who are ready to hire.

With the state experiencing high unemployment, manufacturing plays an important role in New York's economic recovery. Currently, about 50,000 manufacturing jobs are unfilled statewide because of a lack of qualified workers. Many of these positions require associate degrees, certificates or industry credentials.

A strategic public-private partnership is an essential component in the job-training initiative to ensure that students graduate with skills that are immediately relevant in the 21st-century workplace and to spur economic growth. It is also critical to the long-term success of the initiative. In working together, the partners will leverage their inherent strengths and resources to create innovative ways of recruiting and building tomorrow's workforce that will keep manufacturing alive and well and sustain economic prosperity.

The SUNY consortium's community-based approach has drawn praise from U.S. Labor Secretary Hilda Solis. During her visit to MCC in September, she called it a "winning strategy" that serves as a model for other states.

Employers across New York are already aware of the value of public-private partnerships. Gov. Andrew Cuomo's regional economic development councils have demonstrated what higher education and business can accomplish by working together to develop long-term strategic plans for regional economic growth.

Under MCC's leadership, the SUNY consortium and manufacturers including Sydor Optics together will help put thousands of displaced workers and veterans back to work in viable manufacturing careers. The statewide effort is another step toward creating a prosperous future for our families, our communities and New York.

Anne M. Kress is president of Monroe Community College. Jim Sydor is president and owner of Sydor Optics and an MCC alumnus. 10/12/12 (c) 2012 Rochester Business Journal. To obtain permission to reprint this article, call 585-546-8303 or email service@rbj.net.

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