RCBI machinist grads help bridge manufacturing industry 'skills gap'

By CHARLOTTE WEBER

As our country struggles to climb out of recession and millions of jobless Americans look for work, many employers report they are having a hard time finding the skilled workers they need.

Manufacturers in particular complain that too few job applicants can read a blueprint, operate computerized equipment or successfully tackle the other tasks involved in today’s high-tech manufacturing. And manufacturers worry that as members of the “baby boomer” generation start to retire, the situation will get even worse. On one hand, you have a great many people looking for work. On the other hand, you have lots of jobs going unfilled.

That’s the paradox presented by what’s being called the “skills gap.” The sad fact is that many job seekers lack the skills needed to fill current job openings in manufacturing.

There’s a perception that there are no jobs in manufacturing. It’s an erroneous premise fueled by frequent news media reports of plant closing and layoffs. It sometimes seems that everybody has a friend or family member who has lost his or her job.

Certainly it’s true that automation and foreign competition have combined to squeeze U.S. manufacturing as never before. The U.S. Department of Labor projects that employment in the nation’s machining industry will decline by 10 percent during the next 10 years. But skilled machinists are retiring at a rate that far exceeds any downturn the industry is likely to experience. The net result: a steady need for machinists to fill the openings left by the retirees and not enough skilled workers to fill those job openings.

In a recent study commissioned by the State of West Virginia, more than two-thirds of the state’s manufacturing employers reported a shortage of qualified job candidates.

In response to this clear-cut shortage, the Robert C. Byrd Institute for Advanced Flexible Manufacturing (RCBI) established our nationally recognized Machinist Technology Program. The program offers not just classroom instruction but the kind of hands-on training needed to qualify individuals for well-paid and available jobs as machinists. More recently we have added a CNC (Computer-Numeric-Control) Specialist Program to our training curriculum.

We are proud of all we do at RCBI. However, I must say we take a special measure of pride in our highly successful machinist training programs. One of the key factors in that success has been the active participation of an Industry Advisory Board whose members assisted us in creating the programs and continue to help guide them.

Graduates of our programs earn national recognized certification by the National Institute for Metalworking Skills (NIMS) and have an opportunity to earn a two-year Associate Degree from Mountwest Community & Technical College or Potomac State College of West Virginia University.

In accompany this July and August, 22 new students graduated from our machinist training...
In ceremonies this July and August, 32 new students graduated from our machinist training programs. Our new graduates earned a total of 103 individual national credentials from NIMS.

We’re pleased to report that the members of our Class of 2011 bring to 317 the number of graduates from our NIMS-accredited programs, and the latest credentials earned by our students bring that total to nearly 1,300. Approximately three-quarters of the programs’ graduates go on to earn their Associate Degrees.

Our graduates have a job placement rate of more than 90 percent. That percentage would be even higher except that many of our graduates opt to continue their education full time before joining the workforce.

I’m also pleased to report that enrollment in our machinist programs across the State has doubled in size this year.

RCBI’s training programs reflect our determination to focus on the type of high-skilled, better-paying, family-supporting jobs that enhance our economy – and help bridge the manufacturing “skills gap.”

Charlotte Weber is Director & CEO of the Robert C. Byrd Institute for Advanced Flexible Manufacturing (RCBI). Founded in 1999, RCBI provides access to cutting edge technology and technical training to manufacturers across West Virginia and the region. For more information on RCBI’s training programs, call 800.469. RCBI (7224) or log on www.rcbi.org.

Manchin visits RCBI Bridgeport

BRIDGEPORT, W.Va. – Technology was the focus when U.S. Senator Joe Manchin spoke at Aurora Flight Sciences here and followed that with a visit to the Robert C. Byrd Institute for Advanced Flexible Manufacturing (RCBI) in Bridgeport. Both visits were part of the Senator’s “Rebuilding America” tour through the state.

Manchin spoke at a ribbon cutting ceremony for Aurora’s new hangar and manufacturing facility on August 10. He noted that the facility will enable Aurora, which currently employs 160 West Virginians, to expand and hire more workers. Aurora is a key supplier for the U.S. Air Force Global Hawk program.

Following his appearance at Aurora, Manchin made a stop at the RCBI Bridgeport Advanced Manufacturing Technology Center, where he visited with employees and expressed his support for RCBI and its programs that support and enhance manufacturing.

RCBI Director & CEO Charlotte Weber voiced her appreciation for the Senator’s visit. “Senator Manchin understands the importance of making things in America and making things in West Virginia,” Weber said, “and we’re indeed grateful at RCBI to have his continuing support.”
U.S. Senator Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., poses with employees at the RCBI Bridgeport Advanced Manufacturing Technology Center during a recent visit to the facility. From left are Don Riddle, Ed Black, Rick Martin, Senator Manchin, Tracy McDowell, Arley Carpenter and Tom Minnich.

Becker/SMC and TRAMCO achieve ISO 9001 certifications

RCBI has assisted two more companies — Becker/SMC in Huntington and TRAMCO in Williamson, W.Va. — in achieving ISO 9001 quality management certifications.

Charlotte Weber, Director and CEO of RCBI, congratulated the two companies. “We’re proud to add their names to the lengthening list of companies we have similarly assisted,” Weber said. RCBI has provided quality management implementation courses and assistance to more than 200 companies and continues to work with additional companies across the service region, helping them develop and implement quality standards.

Becker/SMC designs and manufactures electrical components, open-type and explosion proof motor starters, longwall electrical controls and power distribution equipment for a variety of industries.

RCBI supplied Becker/SMC with ISO 9001 implementation assistance including training all employees on requirements, training internal auditors, leading internal audits, conducting a pre-assessment and supporting the company through its Stage I and Stage II registration audit with BSI (Registrar).

Darron Nelson, quality manager at Becker/SMC, voiced his thanks for the services RCBI rendered and praised Director of Quality Services Erica Cheetham for her assistance, citing her “personal attention, unbiased outside perspective and caring dedication.”

At TRAMCO’s Williamson facility, RCBI trained internal auditors and conducted a practice audit. Many of the procedures developed by RCBI for sister company Kanawha Electric & Machine were implemented at TRAMCO. A locally owned family-operated business now in its third generation of family management, TRAMCO repairs and tests electric motors, operates a 24-hour machine shop and a steel fabrication shop.

“I would advise any company that’s ready to pursue ISO certification to go to RCBI for assistance,” said Scott Sheppard, TRAMCO’s vice president for operations. “Erica didn’t just train our employees in ISO, she educated them in what it’s all about and why it’s so important to us.”

ISO 9001 is a quality management standard established by the International Organization for Standardization. Achieving ISO 9001 certification means a company has implemented steps to meet customers’ quality requirements and satisfy applicable regulatory requirements while aiming to achieve customer satisfaction and achieve continual improvement of its performance in pursuit of those objectives.

RCBI hires quality specialist

Heidi Elaine Pagur of Huntington has joined the staff of the Robert C. Byrd Institute for Advanced Flexible Manufacturing (RCBI) as a quality/environmental systems specialist, RCBI Director & CEO.
Prior to joining RCBI, Pagur was with NGK Spark Plugs (USA) Inc. at its Sissonville plant for 11 years. Previously, she worked at Diamond Electric Manufacturing Co. in Eleanor and CDI Engineering Group in St. Albans.

"Heidi is a wonderful addition to our staff at RCBI," Weber said. "We believe that she and RCBI Quality Director Erica Cheetham will make a great team that will have a positive impact on a great many client companies in our region."

Pagur is based in Huntington but will have statewide responsibilities.

A 1992 graduate of Marshall University, Pagur earned a Bachelor of Arts degree with concentrations in graphics and computer design. She is a certified internal auditor for TS-16949 and ISO-14001 quality management systems.

She is the mother of two children — Laurel Brooke Pagur (age 8) and Gavin Thomas Pagur (age 4).

---

**RCBI grad awarded Grainger scholarship**

A graduate of the Machinist Technology Program at the Robert C. Byrd Institute for Advanced Flexible Manufacturing has been awarded a 2011 Grainger Tools for Tomorrow Scholarship.

James Turner of Grafton was awarded the honor during recent graduation activities for the 2011 machinist class at the RCBI Bridgeport Advanced Manufacturing Technology Center.

Turner, a 2009 graduate of Grafton High School, received a $2,000 scholarship and a customized toolkit upon successfully completing his first-year technical education program.

W.W. Grainger Inc. is a leading supplier of industrial maintenance, repair and operating products. It operates West Virginia branch locations in Huntington, Charleston, Parkersburg and Morgantown.

Grainger instituted its scholarship program for technical education students in 2006.
RCBI tours prove valuable in assessing student interests

Tours and the resulting interaction between hundreds of high school students and the staff at the Robert C. Byrd Institute for Advanced Flexible Manufacturing (RCBI) has proved a valuable tool in making the students aware of rewarding education and career opportunities available to them at RCBI.

Through the first eight months of 2011, nearly 400 individuals representing dozens of high schools and vocational centers participated in tours at RCBI Advanced Manufacturing Technology Centers.

Staff members at RCBI schedule and provide tours throughout the academic year for high school groups. They also take the opportunity to meet one-on-one with students to discuss their interests and career expectations. At RCBI the students get to see first-hand the inner workings of an industrial setting as well as the high-tech, computer-controlled machinery – the lathes, mills, and waterjet or laser cutters – that are used every day in modern manufacturing.

During this interaction, students are informed of the availability of career opportunities in the manufacturing field and the genuine need for skilled machinists and welders that manufacturers experience daily. Even in times of economic uncertainty, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that thousands of jobs go unfilled each year because of a continuing shortage of skilled applicants.

RCBI's doors are always open to educators, students and counselors. RCBI welcomes and encourages students to tour the high-tech, innovative world of manufacturing!

For additional information or to schedule a tour, contact Bryson Karp, Workforce Development Recruiter, at 304.781.1678 or 800.469.RCBI (7224).

---

Calendar...

**RCBI J-STD-001 CIS Training**
September 19, 2011 - 5 days (40 hours) - RCBI Rocket Center - $1,050

**Intro to Abrasives**
October 3, 2011 - 365 day access - Online - $419 to enroll in up to 10 online courses

**Intro to Circuits**
October 3, 2011 - 356 day access - Online - $419 to enroll in up to 10 online courses

**Intro to Materials**
October 3, 2011 - 365 day access - Online - $419 to enroll in up to 10 online courses

**RCBI J-STD-001 Certification for Trainers**
October 3, 2011 - 5 days (40 hours) - RCBI Rocket Center - $2,295

**AutoCAD II - Intro to 3D Modeling**
October 11, 2011 - 3 days (24 hours) - RCBI Huntington - $635

**RCBI IPCA-610 CIS Certification for Operators**
October 11, 2011 - 3 days (24 hours) - RCBI Rocket Center - $695

**Forklift Training**
October 20, 2011 - 1 day (8 hours) - RCBI Bridgeport - $212

**FARO CAM2 Q**
October 25, 2011 - 3 days (24 hours) - RCBI Huntington - $635
Customer Service Training - Critical Elements of Customer Service
November 3, 2011 - 1 day (8 hours) - RCBI Bridgeport - $212

Intro to GD&T
November 8, 2011 - 3 days (24 hours) - RCBI Huntington - $635

RCBI J-STD-001 CIS Training
November 14, 2011 - 5 days (40 hours) - RCBI Rocket Center - $1,050

RCBI IPCA-610 CIS Certification for Operators
November 29, 2011 - 3 days (24 hours) - RCBI Rocket Center - $695

Composite Structures: Fabrication and Damage Repair - Phase 1
December 5, 2011 - 5 days (40 hours) - RCBI Bridgeport - $2,084.50

TECHNOLOGY UPDATE is published by the Robert C. Byrd Institute for Advanced Flexible Manufacturing (RCBI), Celebrating 20 years as West Virginia's Advanced Manufacturing Technology Center, RCBI provides access to cutting edge technology and technical training to manufacturers across the region. Operating Advanced Manufacturing Technology Centers in Huntington, Charleston, Bridgeport and Rocket Center (near Keyser in West Virginia's Eastern Panhandle), its mission includes developing a quality, just-in-time supplier base for the Department of Defense, NASA and the commercial sector. For additional information about RCBI, visit www.rcbi.org.