

Manufacturing jobs left begging - right here in the Merrimack Valley!

The MA unemployment rate has inched down over the last years, from a high of 10.4% in Feb. 2010 to 6.6% today. With lots of job seekers still needing work, its common sense that employers should be able to fill vacant jobs, right? Wrong!

Many skilled jobs, particularly in manufacturing, remain vacant because qualified workers can't be found. A 2011 survey of 1,123 manufacturing execs reported 600,000 jobs are unfilled; 83% of firms say there is a moderate to severe shortage of skilled production workers available for hire.

The ripple effect is huge - without robust production, revenues remain flat, and lower tier workers are not in demand, such as maintenance and sales personnel. Even the workforce of suppliers is affected since manufacturers order less raw materials and parts. A lack of skilled production workers can stunt overall economic growth.



Manufacturing continues to be the largest employer in the Merrimack Valley, with 473 firms employing 24,000 workers. The average weekly wage is \$1,273, substantially more than other jobs requiring less than a college degree. Nonetheless, it's common to hear manufacturing employers say that "Job applicants don't have the skills we're looking for" or "We can't fill our open positions." Hardest to fill jobs are in the precision component sector, where CNC Operators and CNC Programmers are critical in making parts for defense, aerospace, medical technology and communications manufacturers.

A major concern among employers is that the flood of retirements expected over the next decade may account for a whopping 100,000 job openings. Skilled workers are urgently needed

What are we doing to solve this crisis?

MVWIB resources have been used to support training for job seekers to become machinists and/or electronic assemblers at training institutions such as the Center for Manufacturing Technology and LARE. Manufacturers such as Arwood Machine Corp. of Newburyport have utilized the Workforce Training Fund for on-the-job training, or sent workers to Whittier Tech to earn National Institute of Manufacturing (NIMS) industry recognized credentials. The State Energy Sector Partnership supported training for assemblers hired by Solectria, Inc. in Lawrence.

To further support these efforts and expand resources in this critical sector the MVWIB has united with other regional WIBs; the MA Secretaries of Labor and Workforce Development, Economic Development, and Higher Education; and training providers to form the Northeastern Massachusetts Manufacturing Consortium. The focus is on increasing awareness of good employment opportunities in manufacturing, locating the resources for additional job training, and expanding training programs. Stay tuned for updates on progress to support our manufacturing base and offer career pathways in manufacturing to local workers.