

## BERKSHIRE COMMUNITY COLLEGE'S NEW ADVANCED MANUFACTURING TRANSITION PROGRAM

by Jesse Cohen, BIC Contributing Writer



As BIC partners know, there is significant demand in the area for technicians with the skills to staff the high-tech factory floors of today. At the same time, there are many in the Berkshires looking to enter the workforce or make a career change, but who may not be aware of the advantages of the advanced manufacturing sector or believe themselves unable to acquire the necessary skills quickly and affordably. BCC's new Advanced Manufacturing Transition program is bridging that gap.

Berkshire Community College is using funding from the American Rescue Plan, passed last year as part of the federal COVID response, to offer this one-year certificate program at low or even no cost. This fully in-person program offers the skills needed for full-time work as an Advanced Manufacturing Technician, and students can also continue for an additional year to earn an associate's degree in Mechatronics. This opens the door for graduates to gain work experience and practical training as well as pursue the option of transferring their credits towards a four-year degree in an engineering discipline.

The program requires little math knowledge or previous experience and is designed to equip students with the skills necessary to work in manufacturing and adapt to new technologies. Students learn necessary computer skills as well as how to diagnose and fix mechanical problems on an assembly line. Someone who comes through this program will have mastered several common machines but also will be able and excited to learn to operate new machines. The program is designed for people with an aptitude for working with their hands and being creative, whether they be fresh out of high school or seeking a late career change, and teach them to apply those skills to advanced manufacturing. The curriculum covers all the necessary skills from OSHA safety guidelines to soldering skills, and is designed to ensure graduates will have all the necessary skills to succeed as Advanced Manufacturing Technicians. It is a fully in-person program that utilizes BCC's new makerspace to offer hands-on, practical training, taught by distinguished Engineering faculty.

Deb Sarlin, Executive Director of Community Education and Workforce Development at BCC, is available for input or questions from local employers, as the program is intended to meet the particular needs of Berkshire companies. Contact Deb Sarlin at dsarlin@berkshirecc.edu or (413) 236-2107.

### COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT:

#### 3 QUESTIONS FOR MASSHIRE BERKSHIRE WORKFORCE BOARD

The Berkshire Innovation Center sat down with Heather Boulger, Executive Director, to discuss workforce training initiatives.



**Q. The Future Skills Roadshow held at the BIC in June 2022 was an overview of new funding opportunities. What was your take-away from that event, why was it important, and what should manufacturers be doing?**

A. The Future Skills Roadshow highlighted a variety of resources available for recruitment, retention and training that Massachusetts' employers can take advantage of. We were pleased with the turnout at the Roadshow and received great feedback. As a result, we have several training opportunities in the pipeline and we continue to follow up with employers to connect them to resources to help them find and retain quality workers. One of the biggest things manufactures can do is to stay connected with the MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board who works in collaboration with many organizations to assist with employment needs. MassHire can help with recruitment, retention, and filling the workforce pipelines and our services are free. We currently serve about 800 area employers across multiple industries.

**Q. There is shortage of workers in many industries, especially manufacturing, and with many people looking to shift careers, how can we help them transition?**

A. For those looking to change careers, the key is also to stay connected. The MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board, through the MassHire Berkshire Career Center, offers job fairs, job clubs, and trainings, including literacy and basic work skills courses. Services are provided at no-cost and can be provided both in-person and virtually. We serve about 3,000 adults annually with a 70% job placement rate and we have about 200 adults participate in our training programs which see about 75% job placement.

**Q. In an effort to develop a pipeline of talent in the region, how do we make sure our area youth are aware of career opportunities and pathways that are available?**

A. Youth are 100% of our future workforce and it's our mission to connect our young people with as many career readiness options as possible. The MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board's college and readiness initiative serves about 3,500 youth annually which works with middle/high school guidance counselors to identify career interests and develops programs such as internships, job shadowing, career fairs, and STEM fairs. We also implement a teacher externship program to connect local educators to area businesses so they can learn first hand about opportunities and use that knowledge to help shape their curriculum. MassHire also has a variety of pipeline programs, job clubs, and training to connect adults to on-the-job training and employment resources. We are grateful to the 350+ businesses that provide these pipeline activities to our residents.