

Berkshire Community College's 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 a distinguished Engineering faculty.

BIC Partners know that the "factory floor" of today is clean and quiet, and that manufacturing jobs are stable, pay a very livable wage, and offer a satisfying sense of building and creating. The low cost and short time frame of this program make these jobs much more accessible to a wide range of Berkshire residents. The long-term goal is to establish a pipeline and ultimately reinvigorate the Berkshires' culture of hands-on innovation. The program is currently funded by limited-time pandemic relief, but should it be successful in placing graduates in manufacturing jobs, it is likely to become a permanent part of the BCC catalog.

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.