

Local manufacturing opportunities

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Peter Odierna and Others

National Manufacturing Day is always an important day for the Bennington County Industrial Corp. (BCIC) given our work to support manufacturers in Bennington County. The term "manufacturing" has not changed in many decades, however the state of modern manufacturing has radically changed over the last 20-30 years. While manufacturing employment is down significantly over that time, manufacturing output in the United States is at an all time high.

This dynamic is largely a result of the technology revolution leading to a much more efficient manufacturing process. It has also changed the job description of manufacturing jobs. Generations ago, many young and women left high school in order to get a job at the local factory. This was possible then because the primary job requirement was a strong back. The environment in today's manufacturing is vastly different due to technology advancements such as automation and principles of Lean Manufacturing.

Indeed, in the modern manufacturing environment technicians are likely to be operating laptops that run state of the art machinery and equipment. This has resulted in a much different skill set than what we think of traditional manufacturing. Modern manufacturing needs fewer unskilled laborers and dramatically more skilled employees well versed in engineering, technology and communication. Yet when we think about manufacturing, many reflect on relicts of the past such as smoke stack industry.

This is one of the reasons it is difficult to get young people interested in modern manufacturing.

Here are a few examples of local manufacturing opportunities:

At Kaman Composites there are people with careers like skilled machinists, fabricating technicians, engineers, business administration, paint technicians, computer controlled process technicians, quality inspectors, and accounting to name a few. Some people do work that is hand crafted while others manage computer controlled machining centers. We have leaders who manage complex systems of information and workflow coordinating with skilled technicians to balance work load, coordinate schedules, communicate needs and progress to continually improve on the profitability of the business. Critical structures for aircraft, spacecraft, X-ray machines, CAT scanners, radiation therapy systems are a few of the uses for the composite parts made there. There are opportunities at Kaman for many different types of very important skills and talents to do important work.

Battenkill Technologies primarily develops inspection systems for the United States Navy. Most of these systems are used to quantify and assess the impact of corrosion on the condition of ships, aircraft and vehicles. This creates career opportunities for both engineers and technicians that have the skills to support both new product development and Manufacturing. Battenkill Technologies is a small business and as such, we look for employees that have the versatility to support both of these types of activities. We provide new employees with the specialized training that our work requires, but the diverse and always changing nature of this work makes us look for technicians and engineers with broad experience and technical backgrounds.

At NSK Steering Systems America, a lathe and machine operators process parts from machine to machine checking dimensions, making slight adjustments, documenting and ensuring that the resulting product is

within tolerance and meets the highest standards. They use a variety of tools on a regular basis, including micrometers, calipers, gages and other measurement equipment to ensure that proper tolerances are upheld. These positions require that the person have the ability to perform basic math and problem solving techniques.

In an effort to inform and excite the next generation workforce about technical career opportunities in modern manufacturing, Mack Molding will host its second 'Made in Vermont' Days at its Headquarters Plant in Arlington from October 20-22. Some 90 students and staff from Mount Anthony, Burr and Burton and Arlington Memorial high schools will tour the f'real frozen beverage blender line, where virtually all of Mack's services come together to build the very complex product. After seeing the way it's done in the real world, the Vermont Manufacturing Extension Center will put the students to the test of building a simulated product themselves. A discussion regarding the skills needed in modern manufacturing and relative career paths will wrap up the day, followed by pizza and f'real shakes. The students will also have the opportunity to sign up for future workshops in various functional areas.

The advancements in technology are evident in traditional industries from agriculture to new industries such as nanotechnology. As the skill sets are being redefined in this space, it is critical for communities across the country, including ours, to develop the next generation workforce to support the industries we have and new ones that will emerge.

BCIC will continue to play a lead role in workforce development for our communities, including Career Week, and The Southshire Challenge. With the best partners we can, and are encouraged that the trend is positive.

Peter Odierna is executive director for the Bennington County Industrial Corp. Richard "Dixie" Zens is president of the BCIC Board of Directors. Contributors: Julie Horst, Mack Molding; Brad Andrews, Kaman Composites of VT; Don DeSacia, NSK Steering Systems America; Bruce Nelson, Battenkill Technologies.