

For Connecticut manufacturers Continuous improvement = continuing education

By Lesia Winiarskyj

CBIA writer/editor

In the last three years, Sterling Machine in Enfield — which manufactures parts for the Black Hawk and other military helicopters — has doubled in size to a \$34 million enterprise with 82 employees. In spite of the company's success, CEO Paul Murphy has wondered how long the half-century-old firm will remain competitive.

The problem isn't outdated equipment, foreign competition or weak demand. It's a drastic workforce shortage — one that threatens the viability of hundreds of small businesses like his.

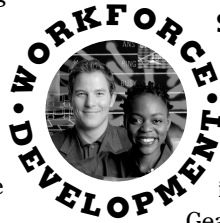
Labor crunch

"Our biggest needs," Murphy says, "are for machinists, manufacturing engineers and CMM [coordinate measuring machine] programmers. We've actually had to pass on projects and contracts because of a lack of employees to handle the work."

To attract area residents to these jobs, Murphy and other local industry leaders have partnered with CBIA and Asnuntuck Community College. "We've been organizing open houses at neighboring high schools, on Asnuntuck's campus and at our own facilities in order to change young people's perceptions of manufacturing careers. We're encouraging them to take a fresh look and see the opportunities that exist."

"There has never been a better time to be in manufacturing," says Judith Resnick, CBIA's director of workforce development. "The work environment is clean and high-tech. Qualified workers are in high demand with competitive pay and excellent prospects for the future. We just need to get the word out, espe-

cially to people 18 to 25 who are exploring the career choices available to them."



Scholarships pave the way

CBIA and manufacturers in north central Connecticut, including Sterling, Aero Gear and Stowe Machine, are providing full scholarships for 27 students to earn manufacturing certificates at Asnuntuck. Students will spend five months in the classroom, after which they will divide their time between classes and paid internships at their sponsor companies. Within a year, those who have successfully completed their coursework and internships will be eligible for a manufacturing certificate, as many as 30 college credits and a permanent position with their sponsor company.

Starting in mid-January, three students will begin their part-time paid internships at Sterling while continuing courses at Asnuntuck three days a week. "They'll gain valuable exposure to all facets of our manufacturing environment," says Murphy. "They'll learn how to read and understand our paperwork, become familiar with our safety programs and work within lean processes. By the time they're ready for full-time employment, they can hit the ground running."

Return on investment

Without programs like these, many graduates are simply not ready for the jobs that await them, says Resnick. "This can be expensive in terms of lost time and productivity, the need for internal training, and the potential for costly errors made on million-dollar pieces of equip-



Sterling Machine's new scholarship intern, Jason Cebula, performs a manual operation for spot facing and drilling a hole in a gun mount detail for a Black Hawk helicopter. He works with a mentor in Sterling's toolroom and will learn various manufacturing processes, including manual machining, CNC machining, assembly, production control, shipping, inspection and engineering.

ment." Studying at Asnuntuck's Manufacturing Technology Center, she explains, is a gateway to the working world. The school offers state-of-the-art facilities and instruction, precision machining technology and equipment, and Web-delivered simulation software.

How can Murphy and others be sure their scholarship dollars are well spent? For starters, they have significant input into the syllabus and the choice of educational software used — meaning that what instructors are teaching mirrors the skills and assets Connecticut's manufacturers need. Companies also receive monthly progress reports on every student they sponsor, allowing them to track grades and attendance.

Students in turn get on-the-job training — paid in full — plus generous scholarships and a chance to work for rapidly growing companies. "They also get our commitment to further their education as high as they want to go," says Murphy.

"Our business is looking very strong out into the future, but we are faced with a real shortage of candidates who are ready to enter the workforce," Murphy says. "I truly



Avoiding discrimination in employment testing and selection procedures



The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has issued a fact sheet on the application of federal anti-discrimination laws to employer tests and other procedures used to screen applicants for hire and select employees for promotion. The document is available at www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/factemployment_procedures.html.

The fact sheet describes employer-administered tests and selection procedures often used in today's workplace, including cognitive tests, personality tests, medical examinations, credit checks and criminal background checks. The document also offers "best practices" for employers to follow when using employment tests and other screening devices, and cites recent EEOC enforcement actions. Discriminatory employment tests and selection procedures are prohibited by Title VII of the Civil Rights

Continuing education

Continued from Page 12

believe that this program is the start of a long-term solution."

The software and a portion of the scholarships that make this program possible are underwritten by CBIA, with funding from the U.S. Department of Labor's High-Growth Job Training Initiative. This \$1.77 million grant helps CBIA promote advanced manufacturing in the state through training opportunities for entry-level and incumbent workers, career-changers, dislocated employees, and students. ■

Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act — all of which are enforced by the EEOC.

"This fact sheet will help employers voluntarily comply with EEOC-enforced statutes, as companies seek lawful and efficient ways to screen large numbers of applicants," says Commission Chair Naomi C. Earp.

The EEOC has observed an increase in employment testing due in part to post-9/11 security concerns and issues related to workplace violence, safety and liability. In addition, the large-scale adoption of online job applications has motivated employers to seek efficient ways to screen big pools of applicants in a non-subjective way.

Charges of job discrimination filed with the EEOC raising issues related to employment testing and screening tools rose from 26 in fiscal year 2003 to 141 in FY 2006. ■

Military spouses now eligible for unemployment compensation

Connecticut now allows employees to collect unemployment compensation when they leave a job to follow a relocating military spouse.

Eligibility requirements in Public Act 07-5 specify that the employee's separation from employment must take place between July 1, 2007, and June 30, 2008. Claimants will be required to provide a copy of the service member's transfer orders.

The majority of claimants who apply for these benefits will already be living out of state, says the Department of Labor. Employers will not be assessed a charge for any former employee now eligible for benefits under the new guidelines.

At least 20 other states permit unemployment benefits for military spouses.

Employment eligibility I-9 form revised

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has revised Form I-9, changing the kinds of documents an employer may accept from a newly hired employee when verifying employment eligibility.

The following five documents have been removed from the form's "column A" list of documents that can be used to prove both identity and eligibility:

- Certificate of U.S. Citizenship (Form N-560 or N-561)
- Certificate of Naturalization (Form N-550 or N-570)
- Alien Registration Receipt Card (Form I-151)
- the unexpired Reentry Permit (Form I-327)

- the unexpired Refugee Travel Document (Form I-571)

USCIS says these documents were removed because they lack sufficient features to deter counterfeiting, tampering and fraud. USCIS has also added a new document, the most recent version of the Employment Authorization Document (Form I-766), to the column A list of acceptable documents.

The new Form I-9, which carries a revision date of 06/05/07 in the lower righthand corner, is now the only valid form. The revised I-9, instructions for completing it, and a fact sheet that answers many questions about the new form are now available by visiting www.uscis.gov/files/pressrelease/FormI9FS110707.pdf.