

Workforce Learning Summit Innovation/Best Practice

Blue Ridge Community College

Changing the Misconceptions of Manufacturing Careers

In 2011, the National Manufacturing Institute found that American manufacturers were unable to fill 600,000 skilled positions, even as unemployment numbers hovered at historic levels. As the economy recovers, across our nation, our state and in our service area, we are experiencing a manufacturing skilled labor shortage... the Skills Gap challenge. Through innovative partnerships among local manufacturers, Blue Ridge Community College, Henderson County Public Schools and the Henderson County Partnership for Economic Development, local manufacturers are stepping up to own this skills gap problem, then moving collectively to develop solutions. Our best practice addresses what Henderson County is doing as a COMMUNITY to change perceptions about what it's like to work in today's manufacturing.

DETAILS

As the local economy recovers, area manufacturers are having difficulty finding qualified skilled workers. Local partners have developed a dual approach to meet manufacturers' talent needs that simultaneously focuses on the workers of today (18-59 year olds) and the workers of tomorrow (11-18 year olds)

Specific strategies include advanced manufacturing camps, Career and College Promise Mechatronics Academies, Robotics Teams and the "Made in Henderson County" initiative.

- Advanced manufacturing camps (Camp TechHead and Young Engineer Experience) are offered at Blue Ridge Community College to spur interest in STEM fields among young people. Activities include: manufacturing and lean experiences; machining, engineering and mechatronics labs; virtual reality and 3d printing; tour of manufacturers; and a trip to Western Carolina University.
- BRCC in partnership with its area public schools (in Henderson and Transylvania counties) sponsors Career and College Promise academies that make courses offering college credit available to high school students at the high school and/or the community college. Advanced Manufacturing Mechatronics Academies are available in both Henderson and Transylvania counties. In some cases, Academy students recruit traditional students.
- Robotics teams or clubs are options for area students at the middle school, high school, community college and university levels. Blue Ridge Community College sponsors a high school robotics club on its campus as well as a robotics club for community college students. There is a First Lego League robotics club for middle schoolers and Western Carolina University sponsors a club and nationally recognized robotics team.
- "Made in Henderson County" is a coordinated effort established to enhance the connection between manufacturing businesses and the Henderson County Public School system.

Henderson County's 135 manufacturers employ over 5,250 people, representing 15% of our workforce, and average wages in excess of \$48,000/year. The effort to enhance connectivity between manufacturing businesses and the school system is focused on raising the visibility of manufacturing as a viable career path to ensure that Henderson County students have diverse employment opportunities in the community, and manufacturing businesses have access to skilled, local talent.

Implementation began in June 2010. (Camps began in June 2010, academies began in August 2012, "Made in Henderson County" began in May 2013 and BRCC-hosted robotics competitions began in April 2014.)

Partner Type(s):

- Business/Industry (direct involvement)
- Economic Development
- Workforce Development Board/One-Stop
- Public Schools

Impact/Outcomes

590 public school students and 75 teachers and counselors have toured local manufacturing facilities and heard presentations about career opportunities in advanced manufacturing. Over 70 students have participated in advanced manufacturing camps and made presentations to their parents about careers in advanced manufacturing. Over 20 educators have participated in advanced manufacturing camps.

"Made in Henderson County" initiative statistics:

- Number of planned interactions with K-12: 22
- Number of industry luncheons with teachers and guidance counselors: 8
- Number of student tour opportunities: 14
- Number of students reached during tours: 590
- Number of schools impacted: 10 (100% of middle and high schools, including Balfour and Early College)
- Number of manufacturing employers involved: 14
- "Made in Henderson County" video views (first three weeks, April 2014): 559
- Number of K-12 staff involved: 75% (100% of Career and Technical Education teachers and guidance counselors)

Funding Sources

Camps - Approximately \$10,000 per year. Originally funded through Tech Prep Grant; now funded through BRCC Foundation.

Made in Henderson County - \$3000 for video. Funded through Henderson County Partnership for Economic Development

REFLECTIONS

Innovation or Best Practice

The innovation lies in the manufacturers owning the skills gap problem and moving collectively to develop solutions.

Lessons Learned

Manufacturing involvement is critical.

Scalability

Can be replicated at many levels inexpensively.

RESOURCES**Workforce Learning Summit Presenters**

Julie Thompson, Vice President for Economic and Workforce Development, Blue Ridge Community College, Flat Rock

Pete Szelwach, Plant Manager, Clement Pappas, Hendersonville

Dr. Helen Owen, Career Tech Education Director, Henderson County Public Schools, Hendersonville

Shanda Bedoian, Director Corporate & Customized Training, Blue Ridge Community College, Flat Rock

Chris English, Dean for Applied Technologies, Blue Ridge Community College, Flat Rock

Links

www.madeinhendersoncounty.com

For Further Information

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