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Realizing a positive return on investment

Through the Indiana Department of Workforce Development grant, employees and employers are seeing a significant return on their investment in the SkillUp program in La Porte County.

Tim Johnson, president of MCTD Inc. in Michigan City, has been a proponent of the SkillUp program since it's inception. "We have been involved in all three iterations of the program over the past couple of years," Johnson said. "Manufacturing jobs in La Porte County need educated employees who are trained for the unique technology that is used in our production. The SkillUp program has allowed our corporation and others to benefit by upgrading the skillset of employees on our factory floor."

The Northwest Indiana Workforce Board (NWIWB) oversees the use of grant money to prepare the pipeline of workers for manufacturers in the county and greater region. NWIWB has partnered with several local schools and manufacturing organizations to ensure that the funds are used to improve the skillset of current employees as well as provide educated and trained workers for the future.

In the case of MCTD Inc., the tangible results showcase the benefits of the program.

"We use CAD/CAM software called Mastercam for 3D CNC machining," Johnson explained. "Finding workers who know how to use the software to its' fullest capabilities are very challenging. Through the SkillUp grant, we were able to send one of our current employees to a class in South Bend. Mike (Granger) was able to acquire new skills that benefitted our company and expanded his individual skillset."

There's quite a lot to dissect in Johnson's statement. The components provide a perfect example of how the SkillUp grant benefits manufacturing companies and workers across La Porte County and the nearby region.

CNC is short for computer numerical control. The CNC process automates the process of manual control, where live operators are needed to prompt and guide the commands of machining tools via levers, buttons and wheels. A CNC system resembles a regular set of computer components, but the software programs and consoles employed in CNC machining distinguish it from all other forms of computation. Workers trained in CNC machining are very valuable assets to their management.

3D machining is a new version of Mastercam software that expands the capabilities of CNC processing. Machinists must be trained in how the software works in order to reap the benefits. It can be challenging to find the appropriate classes to learn the software. Ivy Tech in South Bend offers the class every year, and MCTD Inc. took advantage of the opportunity.

Mike Granger has been an employee at MCTD Inc. for over 20 years. He jumped at the chance to take the class and expand his skillset. Johnson worked with NWIWB to get SkillUp funds for the tuition at Ivy Tech. MCTD Inc. paid for books and other necessities. The collaboration resulted in Granger acquiring the Mastercam skillset to utilize the software for machining at MCTD Inc. That provided the company with a new ability to offer clients – 3D CNC machining in tool & die machines they sold. The company benefitted financially, and Granger acquired a valuable skillset that made him an even more employable machinist.

The return on investment for all involved has been impressive.

"The Mastercam software allows me to program our machines faster and more precise," Granger said. "3D machining is the forefront of technology for manufacturing. I was excited and grateful to be get the opportunity to take the class and learn new tools."

The 12-week class at Ivy Tech was a 30-minute drive for Granger, one he was happy to invest in. He said the class not only taught him the use of the software but enlightened the way he thought about CNC machining.

“Learning what 3D machining could do provided me with a different way of looking at the job,” he said. “The software utilizes applied physics to be more efficient. I feel like I can accomplish new and unique tasks in our business.”

Johnson calls it a win-win for the company and the employee. “Both of us have benefitted from Mike’s new skills,” he said. “This is what the SkillUp program was intended to do – keep and improve manufacturing jobs in La Porte County. Machining occupations are growing and evolving in La Porte County, and we encourage other local manufacturers to join the collaboration in efforts to build the workforce we need for today and for the future.”

Linda Woloshansky, President & CEO of the Center of Workforce Innovations and staff to the NWIWB, said the impact of this initiative will be tremendous, not only on manufacturing sector partnerships, but also on the community. She said that the intent is to develop a framework which can be applied to other industries and in other counties throughout the region.

“The initiative will also extend outstanding opportunities for high school students including those who participate in Career & Technical Education (CTE), local college students, and adults seeking a career in manufacturing,” Woloshansky said.

SkillUp is not just for current employees. The program is available for high school students who are interested in a career in manufacturing, as well as those currently unemployed and in search of a manufacturing career.

High school students and parents are encouraged to contact their school’s career counselor to learn more about SkillUp. Those looking for a manufacturing career should contact the closest Work One office.

Manufacturers participating in SkillUp include:

Renolit
MCTD Inc.
Sullair
Sullivan Palatek
Packaging Logic Inc.
Arconic
Master Roll Manufacturing
American Licorice Company

Schools participating in SkillUp include:

Ivy Tech Community College
Purdue University Northwest
LaPorte Community Schools
Michigan City Area Schools
New Durham Township Schools
South Central Community School Corporation
Tri-Township Schools