

Submission from the Center of Workforce Innovations

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Sweet Results through SkillUp

The SkillUp program is helping **American Licorice** build up their maintenance workforce internally, providing critical help now and for the future.

Carol Flaherty, the HR business partner at American Licorice in La Porte, collaborated with other local manufacturers to learn more about the SkillUp program. “We have a need for additional maintenance workers here in our La Porte factory,” she said. “SkillUp helped provide funds for a pool of our existing workers take classes to acquire those skills. It’s been a win-win for both American Licorice and our employees.”

The Northwest Indiana Workforce Board (NWIWB) oversees the use of grant money from the Department of Workforce Development to prepare the pipeline of workers for manufacturers in the county and greater region. NWIWB 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.

American Licorice is a perfect example of how the program can help the business by helping the employees. Maintenance manager Jeremy Morton developed an interview process to determine which employees had the “mechanical mindset” that maintenance workers would need. “We took the top nine test scores and put those employees into the first program,” he said. “It’s a two-year program where employees go to Ivy Tech on their own time. It takes dedication and commitment on their part.”

Classes include welding, mechanics, fabrication, electric, PLC and CNC programming, and additional maintenance courses. American Licorice partnered with Ivy Tech to develop a program that would result in maintenance workers who could handle the equipment and controls specific to their business. Classes began in the fall of 2019 and continue through the summer of 2021. The components provide a perfect example of how the SkillUp grant benefits manufacturing companies and workers across La Porte County and the nearby region.

Brandon Smith is a maintenance apprentice at American Licorice. Smith has worked in the production side of the company for several years before applying for the maintenance program. After testing well and being accepted, he received SkillUp grant money to pay for classes at Ivy Tech.

“The maintenance program is a great opportunity,” Smith said. “I am learning critical skills that make me much more valuable to the company.”

Smith has a mentor on staff to guide him through the apprenticeship program. “It’s really on the job training,” he said. “I get to take what I learn in the classroom and apply it to a real setting every day. The work helps to reinforce the training, and vice versa.”

As the maintenance manager, Morton oversees the apprentices as part of his workload. “I can see how the on the job work supplements the classroom training,” he said. “I can also determine which apprentices are more adapt at welding, electrical, and so on. Not everyone can apply particular skills at the same level. That’s ok, not all of them will perform the exact same work down the road.”

Morton also believes there is a big benefit from training employees who already work for American Licorice. “These workers have already invested in the company,” he said. “Most have a home and family in the area. They want to be here for the long run, and that’s a big benefit for the company.”

High school seniors can apply for funds to attend Ivy Tech and learn the manufacturing maintenance skills so desperately needed. “American Licorice is only one of a dozen or more companies who need maintenance workers,” Flaherty said.

Linda Woloshansky, President & CEO of the Center of Workforce Innovations and staff to the NWIWB, said the impact of this initiative is tremendous, not only on manufacturing sector partnerships, but also on the community. She said that the intent is to develop a framework that 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 the school’s career counselor to learn more about SkillUp. Those looking for a manufacturing career should contact the closest WorkOne office.

INFO BOX:

Manufacturers participating in La Porte County SkillUp Network 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
La Porte Community Schools

Michigan City Area Schools
New Durham Township Schools
South Central Community School Corporation
Tri-Township Schools