

E2E center focuses on manufacturing

HCC calls E2E a success

By Sloane M. Perron
Staff writer

WARE – On Oct. 4, the Education to Employment, or E2E, training center located at 23 West Main St. celebrated local manufacturing companies by holding an open house for potential job-seekers. Manufacturing Day allowed them to learn more about jobs at various companies.

Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board Executive Director Patricia Crosby opened the event with a speech describing the current job market in the area, focusing on the manufacturing sector. "Community events like this are important because it lets them [the public] see behind the manufacturing walls," she said. The FHREB also offers job counseling at the E2E.

The E2E center was created through a partnership between Holyoke Community College and the Quaboag Valley Community Development Corp.

HCC Vice President of Adult Basic Education and Workforce Development Kermit Dunkelberg spoke about the importance of Manufacturing Day. "The number of manufacturers in this community is surprising," he said. "They are thriving, but they need people." Whether it is manufacturing, healthcare, banking, or educational opportunities, the goal of E2E is to help individuals to develop the skills they need so that they can thrive no matter which path they take in life. Dunkelberg said that by "building up" basic math and reading skills, the E2E helps people improve their job prospects while educating them about their opportunities.

"This entire center has been very successful, and we want it to be as vibrant and successful as can be," Dunkelberg said.

Some of the local manufacturers that participated included Quabbin Wire, Vibram, Kanzaki, Gillespie Corp., C & G Machine,

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Sanderson MacLeod, G & G Medical, Palmer Foundry, Ace Molding and CIRCOR. Crosby said that she appreciated companies were willing to participate in the event. Job seekers had the opportunity to see the variety of available jobs in the greater Ware region. Another goal of the evening according to Crosby, "Was to dispel stereotypes about manufacturing."

Local legislators, state Sen. Anne Gobi, D-Spencer, and State Rep. Todd Smola, spoke about the positive impact that manufacturing has on the local economy. Gobi called Manufacturing Day "awesome," and said growing manufacturing companies cannot find all the workers they need. "We still have these positions that are available that we just can't fill because people do not have the skills for them," Gobi said. As a result, work training facilities like E2E are instrumental in closing this gap by helping people gain the skills they need to acquire better employment opportunities and improve their lives. Gobi said colleges get credit for students who attend two or four-year colleges, but she would also like to see them get credit for students who decide to enter the military or a tech school to help balance out the opportunities that are available for young people.

"We talk to so many people, we talk about the skills gap," Smola agreed. He believes that as the Massachusetts economy continues to grow, the trend of entering a four-year college will also change. Instead, he advocated for more diverse futures as young people realize that manufacturing jobs are just as important as a good education. Instead of college being a one size fits all, Smola said, "It is about connecting those individuals with their right path." Whether education, the military, or manufacturing, which Smola called the "lifeblood" of the nation, he said he believes the future will consist of "a rising tide that lifts every boat."

Palmer Foundry Director of Finance Michael J.



Turley Publications by staff writer Sloane M. Perron

Kemp talked about how his company uses aluminum casting to make a variety of "critically-used parts" for industries such as industrial hoists, robotics and laboratories. "We're a growing business," Kemp said. Due to that growth, Palmer Foundry is one of several companies eager to hire new workers. For their general manufacturing associate positions, they are looking for people with soft skills who have strong work ethics and show up on time. "That is the biggest challenge finding people who want to work and want to grow," Kemp said. For every hour worked by a union worker, Kemp said that the company puts 60 cents into their 401k. In addition to their competitive benefits, Kemp said that the Palmer Foundry is proud of its growing gender representation as more women enter the formerly male-dominated workforce.

"For us, we are trying to support E2E and get the word out that we are here and that we have great jobs," said Melissa Seganek, a human resources generalist with Quabbin Wire. She said that no previous experience is

needed to work at Quabbin Wire since they train on the job. While mechanical aptitude is a plus, the company also looks for dependability and reliability. The company based in Ware employs about 100 people and is always looking to add workers who show a natural curiosity and take pride in their work. "People can make a very good career with very little education or experience coming in," she said. "There are a lot of cable companies out here, but our distinction is our quality."

Rebecca Gibson, from Sanderson MacLeod in Palmer, attended Manufacturing Day in hopes of attracting potential employees. "We really want people that want a job and that want to come in and work with us every day," Gibson said. There are currently 10 positions open for operators and mechanics on first and second shifts. Those interested in becoming a mechanic for Sanderson MacLeod must have mechanical experience or simply must have fun "tinkering" with mechanical parts. Meanwhile, operators do not need prior experience and can be trained on the job.

Aimee Correa and Jessica Perez from the staffing department at Vibram, located in North Brookfield, described Vibram as a "major part" of E2E manufacturing class since they sent five employees to attend the event. "We are very active about working in the community and the schools," Correa said about the events that Vibram hosts to teach the children and the public more about the work that Vibram does. Currently, many of their workers are entering retirement so the company is looking for its next generation of workers. In addition to job training, the staff at Vibram also offer soft skill classes to make their employees better overall professionals. "We help them better themselves, which will help them in life," Correa said. According to the staffing department, as long as an employee has "attitude, behavior, and attendance," the rest of the job can be taught to them, but those three qualities are essential to a successful career at Vibram.