

# Success in **Operations**

## *Strengthening Local Manufacturing through a Customized Approach*

### **McHenry County Work Center**

 15 Employees  Woodstock, Illinois  [www.mchenrycountyworkforce.com](http://www.mchenrycountyworkforce.com)

#### **SITUATION**

The McHenry County Workforce Network partners with a variety of local stakeholders to help live the vision to “create a skilled workforce in McHenry County that will help the community achieve economic prosperity.” This has produced many success stories over the years. One recent example of success is the development of the Industrial Maintenance Training Program, which provided local area manufacturers with grant funds to offset the cost of training..

#### **SOLUTION**

The Industrial Maintenance Training Program was derived from feedback the organization received from local businesses. As Director Julie Courtney explains, “local manufacturers are having a difficult time finding trained industrial maintenance mechanics. This is becoming more and more of an issue as their current workforce are aging and retiring.” Unable to find a local program currently in place, the McHenry County Workforce Network (MCWN) reached out to McHenry County College for assistance. MCC was able to develop the area’s first Industrial Maintenance Training Program. This 33-hour certification program equips students with the skills and knowledge they need to assemble, install, troubleshoot, repair and modify machinery and automated systems across a variety of industries. There are 24 participants from seven area employers enrolled in the current program. The first 18 participants will graduate this May and the program will ensure that local manufactures have access to the skilled workers they need for years to come.

As the MCWN dug deeper into the workforce needs of McHenry County manufacturers, they also recognized an opportunity to help companies improve their bottom line. Through their conversations with business owners, it was found that many maintenance supervisors were focused primarily on “putting out fires” rather than developing a systematic approach to overall care. The MCWN wanted to help companies shift this perspective to a more proactive one; partnering with the Illinois Manufacturing Excellence Center (IMEC) to offer a six-month intensive program for maintenance supervisors and managers called the “Fundamentals of Maintenance Excellence.” Twenty supervisors from eight companies participated in the flagship program which ended in March and the results have been outstanding.

Kenneth Bach from Induction Heat Treating in Crystal Lake noted this new program “helped change maintenance from a repair department to helping with continuous improvement, customer delivery times and productivity.” And he is not alone in this sentiment. By moving from a reactionary to a proactive approach companies have been able to avoid potential problems, increase productivity, and ultimately improve customer satisfaction and sales. All of this translates to lower costs and real improvements for the bottom line. On average, participating employers have said half of a million dollars in unnecessary capital investments. In addition, the county will benefit by an average of \$1.2 million in investment and the creation or retention of over 50 local jobs. Of the companies that provided feedback, all have agreed the benefits from participation exceed its cost. But the MCWN did not stop there. they will realize over \$6 million in new or retained sales, save nearly \$2 million in operating costs, and save just over half of a million dollars in unnecessary capital investments. In addition, the county will benefit by an average of \$1.2 million in investment and the creation or retention of over 50 local jobs. Of the companies that provided feedback, all have agreed the benefits from participation exceed its cost. But the MCWN did not stop there

A third area that required attention was plastics. Plastics is a large part of the manufacturing community in McHenry County and the MCWN felt additional focus was necessary to address the maintenance needs that are unique to this industry, MCWN reached out to plastics industry equipment provider and training firm, RJG, for assistance. RJG's training facility is located in Georgia and employers would typically have to pay to send their employees to RJG's out-ofstate facilities for training. This often made it inaccessible to McHenry County manufacturers. "Couldn't we find a different way?" Julie asked. The answer was "Yes." The result was a 3-day Machine Maintenance Workshop right here in McHenry County for eight employees that focused solely on the needs of those working with injection molding machines and ancillary equipment, and a huge win-win for everyone involved.

These are just a few examples of how the McHenry County Workforce Network, and local partners, like MCC, can make a positive impact on the local economy. So what does the future hold for the McHenry County Workforce Network? Julie hopes these targeted programs are the first of many for the area.

## RESULTS

- Increased productivity, improved customer satisfaction and sales
- Lower costs and real improvements for the bottom line
- Half of a million dollars in unnecessary capital investments
- Creation or retention of over 50 local jobs

“ We will continue to work on finding federal grants and funding sources for programs that focus on the specific skill sets our businesses need to grow. ”

- Julie Courtney, Director

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