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William Pratt and Tavi Udrea: Closing the manufacturing skills gap in the county

Our county has much to be proud of when it comes to manufacturing. The manufacturing industry generates almost 30,000 jobs in Ventura County — nearly 13 percent of the private-sector labor force.

The region ranks fourth in the nation for high-paying jobs in the manufacturing sector, with an average wage of \$94,344 annually. And, our local businesses are actively seeking more qualified workers to fill their ranks.

For manufacturing to meet the high levels of production and productivity that are required for business growth, skilled workers are essential. While we have a wide range of opportunities in Ventura County for well-paying jobs with career paths in manufacturing, many employers still struggle to find work-ready candidates — especially at the entry level.

Today's advanced manufacturing jobs require basic math and reading skills, plus technical aptitude, problem solving, teamwork and a solid work ethic.

How do workers acquire these attributes so they are well-positioned for jobs with a promising future in manufacturing? It takes the collaborative effort of businesses, education and government.

One government entity that is a leader in matching the labor needs of manufacturing by developing the skill sets of workers through training and education is the Workforce Investment Board of Ventura County (WIBVC). As manufacturers who sit on the board, we can see that the collaborative effort is paying off.

The Manufacturing Committee of the WIBVC, for example, has developed a set of business-driven criteria for entry-level workers. The criteria are being used as a foundation for a manufacturing readiness certificate that is now in development by our partners in K-14 education.

The committee also has been the catalyst for a new biomedical device certificate program at Moorpark and Ventura colleges, which, when approved, will be the first two-campus certificate in the California Community College system.

The Manufacturing Roundtable of Ventura County, launched by WIBVC, is a new employer-driven, collaborative forum whose focus includes developing a relevant, ready workforce

Through the round-table, local companies participate in National Manufacturing Day, opening their doors to students and teachers for an exciting, firsthand look at the high-tech, sophisticated and fascinating challenges of careers in manufacturing.

The cost of acquiring a job-ready education in manufacturing can be a challenge for job seekers. For youth, adults, and dislocated workers who are eligible for assistance, WIBVC collaborates with educators in Ventura County to help provide access to training resources.

These providers include local community colleges, adult education schools and trade schools.

In addition, WIBVC provides job seeker funding through the local America's Job Center of California to support résumé writing, interview preparation, job searches, training and other services.

Also costly is the process of finding and training good employees — especially for small manufacturers. Through the AJCC team and other partners, WIBVC provides funding for easy access to no-cost and low-cost business services.

Employers have direct access to recruitment resources, job posting, résumé reviews, pre-screening job candidates, candidate skills assessments and meeting facilities to conduct interviews — all at no charge. In addition, employers may apply for incumbent worker training subsidies.

WIBVC collaborated with Rep. Julia Brownley to facilitate Ventura County participation in the new Advanced Manufacturing Partnership for Southern California. AMP SoCal recently received a federal designation that will position the region (Los Angeles, Orange, San Diego and Ventura counties) for competitive access to significant federal funding in advanced manufacturing, including support for workforce development.

We encourage manufacturers and other local businesses to open their doors to our future workforce and to take advantage of the no-cost and low-cost resources in Ventura County. Let's keep county manufacturing competitive and ready for growth.

For more information on business resources, visit one of the WIBVC websites:
www.venturacountygrowsbusiness.com or www.wib.ventura.org.

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