

# ◆ Apprenticeships Lead to Bright Manufacturing Future >>> Diane Ploch

Apprenticeships are to the manufacturing world what internships are to the healthcare field — a training ground where students of the trade acquire hands-on skills and first-hand knowledge, while being paid. An apprenticeship is a crucial and helpful step to a permanent job and successful career, yet also a valuable resource in the success of manufacturing. H&T Waterbury, Inc. General Manager Ron Turmel said, “The Waterbury/Naugatuck Valley area is known as the metal forming/stamping capital of the world due to the highly skilled workforce that has been developed and maintained through many apprenticeship programs.”

Nothing new, apprenticeships in some area manufacturing companies have been in existence for decades. Stewart EFI, a precision stamping company in Thomaston, has been offering an apprenticeship program for 27 years. Human Resource Manager Cathie Pragano said, “The apprenticeships teach the toolmaker about the trade and about our business.” An apprenticeship program has been part of the training at Prospect Machine Products, Inc. since the company was founded in 1950, according to President Richard Laurenzi. He said, “You can’t do the work we do without this skill set.” Turmel said, “We started our program at H&T Waterbury 30 years ago to develop a highly skilled workforce to ensure the future of our business.”

Other companies, like Marion Manufacturing Company in Cheshire have instituted programs more recently. Vice President Douglas Johnson said, “We started the program two years ago as the company started to recover from the downturn in 2008. We needed skilled employees and were faced with an aging workforce. Our company had three Class A toolmakers who were approaching 65. We felt that we should start a formal program, as it would be a tremendous loss to not pass down all that experience to our next generation of skilled workers.”



Prospect Machine Products, Inc. Pre-Apprentice Patrick Tobin is a senior at Kaynor Tech.

## Who are the Apprentices?

The apprentices vary from graduates of high school technical programs and college certificate programs to adults changing careers or already working with in a company. Technical high schools in the region used as a resource include Kaynor Tech, Oliver Wolcott, Bristol Tech and Wilcox Tech. Some students have the opportunity to start as a pre-apprentice while still in high school.

The apprentice program at Prospect Machine Products, Inc. is under the auspices of the Connecticut Department of Labor. “We stay close to the machine tool major at Kaynor,” said Laurenzi. “The teachers have always been helpful to us in placing students here.” Another option at Prospect Machine Products, Inc. is the PTX program for adults. “Candidates are full-time employees at the company who demonstrate the rudiments of tool and die and who want to progress,” Laurenzi says. “We have moved four of these candidates through PTX in the last 10 years and two of them remain with us.”

## Time Invested Pays Off

The standard apprenticeship program requires 8,000 hours of time, with the apprentice being paid. At Prospect Machine Products, Inc., the Department of Labor provides them a diary for recording progress of the apprentice through the 8,000 hours. The company follows the state guidelines for periodic pay raises during that time.

At Stewart EFI, apprentices start with 4,000 to 5,000 hours in the tool room and then gain other experience in various areas, such as: the Quality Department, learning the basics of what an inspector does; time with machinists to learn the basics of fixing the machines; and the production floor where they learn how a set-up is done and how to produce parts. “At the end of their time, we place



Stewart EFI Apprentices Michael Baker (left) and Bill Stepney (right) work with Tool Room Supervisor Bob Geddes.

them in the area that we feel the apprentice will be at his/her best within our organization,” said Pragano. “After a starting wage, they receive an increase for each 1,000 hours they complete. A supervisor must approve the increase, which means they are satisfied the apprentice is ready to move to the next level.”

At H&T Waterbury, the 8,000 hours take approximately four years to complete. The company has a training guide to follow and uses a wage scale

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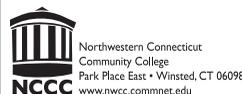
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based on the number of hours the individual has worked in the apprenticeship. Turmel said, "The apprentice works a certain number of hours in many aspects of the trade in order to gain sufficient experience to become fully competent and use good workmanship in all work processes."



H&T Waterbury apprentice Austin Crisanti makes final adjustments to a US Baird Transfer Press.

At Marion Manufacturing, apprentices are full-time employees with benefits. The company currently has two apprentices, who according to Johnson, came from information and contacts made through the Smaller Manufacturers Association of CT and its tie to the technical high schools. One person oversees the day-to-day training, but others also guide the apprentices as needed.

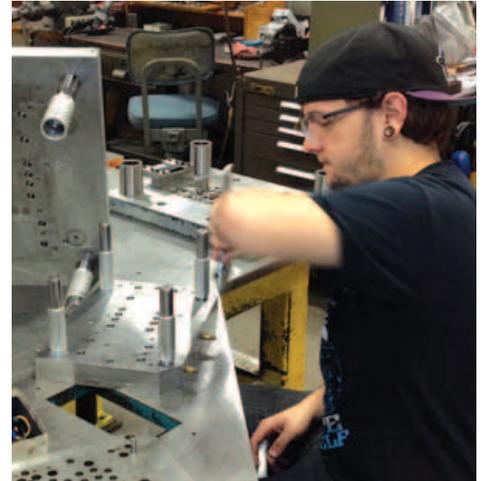
### Apprentice and Company Both Benefit

All the manufacturers we talked to agree that there are benefits to both the apprentice and the company.

Johnson at Marion Manufacturing said, "They (apprentices) benefit from our willingness to train and invest money into teaching them a very lucrative trade. The benefits are tremendous. We get to train and develop our own workforce, while capturing the skills and experience of our older tool and die personnel."

Turmel at H&T Waterbury explained that after the apprentice completes the program, they obtain a Journeyman Certificate. He added, "More tangibly, apprentices learn on the job which enables them to develop a rewarding career and obtain marketable skills."

For the company, he sees the development of skilled workers as an investment for the company's ability to remain competitive, securing jobs for future generations. He said, "This supports our future workforce needs for growth and/or retirement of skilled trade persons."



Marion Manufacturing apprentice Jason Michaud works on a die set.

Laurenzi at Prospect Machine Products, Inc. said, "The benefits to the employee are job security, high wages and a solid middle class life. The benefits to our company are vital. These benefits keep us a going concern."

Pragano at Stewart EFI said, "The apprentice benefits as they become a Journeyman in a skilled trade making a very good salary. Tool making is not by any

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means a dying trade so there will be many opportunities for them in their career. Our company is a manufacturing company that employs toolmakers. In order to have toolmakers, you need the apprenticeship programs."

## Opening the Door to a Permanent Job

Johnson said both his apprentices have made a successful transition from high school graduates to full-time apprentices with a great future in manufacturing. He said, "They are helping us build a better company." Pragano said 99% of the apprentices become employees at Stewart EFI and many tend to stay with the organization. H&T Waterbury has had about 30 apprentices become valued employees in many critical positions in its operation such as Production Toolmakers, Carbide Toolmakers, Electrical Technicians, Maintenance

Machinist, Engineers and CNC Toolmakers. Several have advanced to supervisory and managerial positions. In fact one employee started when he was 18 years old. After completing an apprenticeship, he worked his way through various supervisory positions and became the Production Manager. He has been with H&T Waterbury for 33 years. Another apprentice who was hired as a part-time high school student has now been with the company for four years. Turmel said, "He has become a highly qualified asset to the company and has traveled to our plant in Germany multiple times to support production needs."

Pragano concluded, "We need to let our children know that manufacturing in Connecticut is not dead. It is alive and well and we need good skilled help to continue to grow." ♦



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