

Advanced Manufacturing Technology Center Opens At QVCC



Rep. Christine Rosati Randall, Mark Ojakian, Sen. Tony Guglielmo, Dr. Carlee Drummer, Rep. Mike Alberts, Rep. Danny Rovero, Sen. Mae Flexer, U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney, and Steve LaPointe stand inside the machine shop at QVCC. (D. Coffey/Courant Community)

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Gov. **Dannel Malloy** and U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney joined a host of dignitaries to mark the opening of Quinebaug Valley Community College's Advanced Manufacturing Technology Center on Sept. 30.

The 10,000-square-foot center was built at a cost of \$4,841,000 and contains more than \$1 million in equipment. CNC lathes, milling machines, programmable logic controllers, digital scanners, optical comparators, and measuring devices and gauges will allow students the chance to work with the most advanced equipment in manufacturing.

"This isn't just cutting a ribbon," Malloy said. "We are winning the battle for jobs."

Malloy and the Connecticut legislators in attendance were fresh off a vote that promised Sikorsky Aircraft, a **Lockheed Martin** company, a \$220 million economic incentive package to keep building helicopters in the state.

The company plans to ramp up production of a new heavy lift helicopter for the Navy. The company expects to hire thousands of skilled workers to keep up with its defense contracts and that would impact up to 100 small businesses in the supply chain.

"We have to be ready," Malloy said. "We have to be sure we have the workforce to turn out the product."

Sikorsky, along with Electric Boat, Pratt and Whitney, and General Electric, offers the kind of high technology advanced manufacturing opportunities that promise good-paying jobs to skilled workers. Malloy said a Sikorsky benefit package would be about \$94,000.

"I want those jobs in Connecticut," he said.

The challenge is preparing a workforce to fill the new job openings, as well as to replace those nearing retirement. According to Malloy, EB predicts it will need to hire 12,000 employees. Pratt and Whitney estimates it will need 8,000 people in one division alone. Sikorsky will have to hire thousands.

"And there are well over 75,000 people in the supply chain for those companies," Malloy said.

The center at QVCC is one of seven advanced technology centers in the state whose goal is to provide the training necessary for those jobs. Those centers have partnered with manufacturers, technical high schools, and workforce partners - with the help of a \$6 million grant from the US Department of Labor. That grant created the Eastern Connecticut Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative, a program developed in response to the expansion of EB and affiliated manufacturers in Eastern Connecticut.

The center's completion comes just in time according to Courtney.

"We have great partners and great teammates to step up our game in the trades," he said.

He predicted that challenges to fill those job openings will only increase. The initiative will also assist training development, skills assessments and supportive services to help participants complete training.

Eastford-based manufacturer Whitcraft expects to grow, due to ramped up production of Pratt and Whitney's Turbo Fan Engine and General Electric's LEAP engine.

"For us to grow, we have to train new people," said Whitcraft Group President Jeff Paul.

QVCC instructors have trained at the Eastford facility and have taught leadership modules to Eastford employees at the Danielson campus.

"QVCC takes a lot of risk out of the job hiring process and takes a load off mid-level managers," said Paul, who expects to hire between 30 and 40 new employees over the next few years.

That number may triple due to an aging workforce.

"If you can train on inspection equipment or mechatronics, that takes a burden off us," Paul said. "If a student has signed up and is writing checks to study it, we know that person is interested."

Connecticut State Colleges and Universities President Mark Ojakian called the manufacturing pipeline initiative one that would signal the rebirth of manufacturing in Connecticut.

"We are bringing private individuals, faculty, and businesses together as partners," he said. "This is the future of advanced manufacturing in the state."

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