



For Immediate Release

Joliet Junior College Provides Workforce Solutions in Manufacturing

JJC and Wesco Machine & Tool, Inc. Partner With Registered Apprenticeship Program

(Joliet, IL – March 5, 2020) - One of the greatest challenges facing the manufacturing industry is the increasing skills gap. The shortage of skilled workers to replace a retiring workforce continues to make headlines. Employers are constantly searching for a talented pool of applicants to meet their hiring needs. In many cases, there are more job openings than there are skilled workers to fill the positions.

Joliet Junior College and Wesco Machine & Tool, Inc. are partnering to bridge the skills gap in Chicago's southwest suburbs. JJC is the program sponsor of a Registered Apprenticeship program through the United States Department of Labor (U.S. DOL). Wesco Machine & Tool, Inc. represents the advanced manufacturing sector with a machinist as their U.S. DOL industry-recognized occupation.

Employer Benefits

One of the benefits for employers in this Education/Industry partnership is gaining access to a talented pool of applicants that also have an interest in the skilled trades. Joel Niekamp, president of the Shorewood, Ill. company, explained that he searched for six months to find a candidate that was a match for his machinist position. Niekamp said, "Having access to a pool of individuals actively interested in and taking classes focused on the machining trade was a noticeable benefit to us."

After completing the interview process, Wesco Machine & Tool, Inc. hired JJC student Andrew Schroeder as their very first apprentice. Through the apprenticeship model, Andrew will essentially be able to earn while he learns. As part of the apprenticeship program, Andrew is taking manufacturing courses at JJC for the related training instruction and working at Wesco Machine & Tool, Inc. to gain experience through on-the-job learning.

Real-World Experience

Niekamp also explains that it's very beneficial if an individual already has some fundamental knowledge in manufacturing when they're brought on board. He said, "JJC also assists us greatly in providing the foundational courses needed for an individual to become a machinist – Intro to Machining, GD&T, Metallurgy and CAD/CAM."

Niekamp added, "Shop time is of great value to us, so the more knowledge an individual can pick up outside the shop, the more time we can spend with them on real-world application."

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Paul Cave, associate professor in JJC's technical department, explains how an apprenticeship program provides two-fold benefits to students and has an important role in their success. Cave said, "This apprenticeship opportunity is a great chance for a student to learn about the craft in class and immediately apply those skills in the field."

Cave continued, "The classroom gives the student an ideal baseline, while the on-the-job training allows a student to make money and gain valuable knowledge and real-world experience."

Workforce Solutions

The employment opportunities in manufacturing are definitely available. According to an article published on cnbc.com, "*The National Association of Manufacturers said a record 522,000 jobs remained open in the sector in September (2020).*"**

Amy Murphy, dean of applied arts, workforce education & training at JJC, said, "We are very excited for the partnership with Wesco Machine & Tool, Inc. in our Registered Apprenticeship program because it's another opportunity to provide a viable workforce solution that enhances our local economy."

Murphy added, "There is such a high-demand for skilled workers in the trades, especially in the advanced manufacturing sector, so we are taking a proactive approach when it comes to designing and implementing programs that align the workforce needs of employers and students in our communities."

JJC has a three-year apprenticeship grant through the American Association of Community Colleges/Expanding Community College Apprenticeships initiative to assist the local workforce by growing the number of registered apprenticeships through the United States Department of Labor.

JJC is the sponsor of a registered apprenticeship program through the U.S. DOL with industry-approved occupations representing industry sectors in: manufacturing, culinary arts/hospitality, landscaping, transportation and healthcare.

Wesco Machine & Tool, Inc. is a full-service machine and metal fabrication shop that has expertise in precision machining, design, and CNC programming. The company has 24-hour availability and the capability to develop critical one-off components as well as production machining.

To find out how your company can partner with JJC's Registered Apprenticeship program, visit www.trainingupdate.org/apprenticeship or call (815) 280-6743.

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**Cited source: <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/10/04/manufacturing-sector-is-facing-a-growing-skills-gap.html>

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Photos and cutlines are below:



Wesco Machine & Tool, Inc. is partnering with Joliet Junior College's Registered Apprenticeship program in the advanced manufacturing sector. The company has a machinist as their industry-recognized occupation through the U.S. Department of Labor. Representatives from JJC and Wesco Machine & Tool, Inc. recently participated in a signing event at the company.



Joel Niekamp, president of Wesco Machine & Tool, Inc. in Shorewood, Ill. signs the official employer participation agreement to partner with JJC's Registered Apprenticeship program.



Andrew Schroeder, a current student in JJC's technical program, was hired as a machinist and the company's first apprentice.