

Wanted: Welders ready to work

High-skill
manufacturing
jobs abundant
in Wisconsin

BY KELLY MCBRIDE

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Three local technical colleges today will join forces with more than 30 area businesses to proclaim one message: Manufacturing is alive and well in Northeastern Wisconsin.

It's a message some say has gotten lost amidst recent paper company layoffs, including Georgia-Pacific Corp. cuts announced in October.

"We lost a lot of low-skilled manufacturing jobs," said James Golembeski, executive director of the Bay Area Workforce Development Board. "But higher-skilled manufacturing jobs are around, and, in fact, all these companies are still looking for people."

Northeast Wisconsin Technical College will host at least 30 of those companies at today's Manufacturing Job Fair at the NWTC campus. By pairing prospective employees with business and educational partners from across the region, Job Fair organizers hope to spread the good news about manufacturing opportunities.

It's the largest-scale fair of its kind NWTC has hosted, said Laurie Radke, director of workplace learning services at NWTC. The Manufacturing Job Fair could become an annual event, she

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said. Job fair organizers hope to help attendees hone in on the right opportunity — and possibly related education — for them.

Welding is one area currently in need of workers locally, Radke said, and good leadership skills also are in demand.

"A lot of (businesses) are going to a more team environment," she said. "There's more computer skills that are needed at this point."

To help workers acquire and develop those skills, NWTC, Fox Valley Technical College in Appleton and Lakeshore Technical College in Cleveland will have representatives on hand at today's event. Depending on the position, specialized training can be helpful and even necessary, said Peter Thillman, dean of workforce solutions at Lakeshore Technical College.

"Just to be a welder, doesn't mean you can weld from one company to the next," he said. "When it comes to the manufacturing environment, it truly is a skill where you constantly need to be upgrading your skills."

And there's still money to be made in manufacturing, Golembeski said.

Although the promise of a good salary can be alluring, it's also money concerns that can prevent people from getting the necessary training for higher-paying jobs, Radke said.

Numerous options are available, she said, including financial aid, grant funding and employers willing to reimburse workers who go back to school. Job fair attendees also can talk about those options, Radke said.

With a wide variety of jobs, the manufacturing sector continues to have a vibrant presence in the area, Golembeski said.

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