

SVCC Offers Apprenticeship Opportunities

Global Safety Textile (GST) of South Hill, developers and manufacturers of airbags, airbag textiles and technical textiles, has partnered with Southside Virginia Community College to help develop and train twelve employees to become industrial maintenance technicians.

"In today's current economy, hiring qualified maintenance mechanics is a challenge", said Rob Deutsch, Director of Human Resources for the company.

For years, colleges saw enrollments declining in technical degrees such as Electrical and Mechanical. Unfortunately, for manufacturing this decline presents a real crisis. In fact, the hardest segment of the workforce to staff has been in the skilled trades: welders, electricians and mechanics.

GST, collaborated with SVCC's Dr. Chad Patton, Dean of Career and Technical Training, and Kelly Arnold, Apprenticeship Coordinator, to formulate a strategy to train current employees. Apprenticeship is a tried and true method for training, remarks, Arnold.

"By combining educational classes with on-the-job training, apprentices learn exponentially," she said.

Each class the employees are taking was selected with the intention of transforming the twelve into maintenance technicians for GST.

The group began in January taking classes at Lake Country Advanced Knowledge Center in South Hill. The instructor applies hands-on training to the AC/DC Electrical class.

Dr. Patton said, "All of our teachers in the program have real world experience. We have former department lead instructor for Mechatronics and a host of teachers who are currently working in the Industrial Maintenance field to ensure the instruction is relevant."

The college has also run apprenticeship training for Beach Mold, Georgia Pacific and Toll Brothers located in Emporia/Greenville.

Each week the employees build on the previous class. While some are coming after work and others before work; both groups arrive ready to learn. Long days or nights at work, coupled with educational classes, homework, and tests all prove the group is willing and able to invest in themselves but also into preparing GST to beat the skills gap challenge.

While maintenance technician may not be the new career buzz, it is certainly a profession where both men and women can find employment in Southside Virginia. In fact, recent statistics indicate that job seekers are realizing that skilled trades are in hot demand. For the twelve at GST, the future is bright. The industrial maintenance program involves taking one class per week, for about 18 months, but provides an easily attainable goal. For more information about industrial maintenance or apprenticeship training, visit LCAKC or www.southside.edu SVCC also offers an Associate in Applied Science degree in Industrial Maintenance Technician.