



Alabama Changing The Game In Workforce Development

CPT Certification allows new employees to hit the ground running

TEXT BY CARA D. CLARK // PHOTOS COURTESY OF ACCS

Jeff Lynn, vice chancellor of workforce and economic development, Alabama Community College System, speaks with an enthusiasm that's contagious. He's talking about the dynamic nature of the automotive industry in Alabama, and his role in developing a program to supply the skilled workers that help it thrive.

Lynn joined the Alabama Community College System in October 2016. He had already built a new workforce program in Louisiana, working with new and expanding companies. He now has mapped out a comprehensive program, involving the AAMA, to develop an automotive workforce that's fully prepared to hit the ground running.

"When I moved back to the state of Alabama, I did some analytics to see what makes up the DNA of Alabama these days," he says. "I found out there is a phenomenal manufacturing base

in Alabama with Tier 1 suppliers, Tier 2 suppliers and OEMs."

While he saw the strength of the base, Lynn noted the lack of a corresponding strong workforce pipeline with curriculum programs nationally certified or recognized in high schools and colleges in the state. He knew a Manufacturing Skills Standards Council (MSSC) was what Alabama needed to standardize training and produce workers who were Certified Production Technicians (CPT), Certified Logistics Associates (CLA) or Certified Logistics Technicians (CLT).

"I began to pull together a program because I saw a desperate need to help develop that talent," Lynn says.

The resulting Ready to Work (RTW) program and CPT certification is cutting edge stuff — not just in the automotive sector. The program provides a career pathway for individuals with limited education and

experience and gives trainees the entry-level skills required. The curriculum is set to standards sought by business and industry employers and the skills cited in the U.S. Department of Labor's Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills Reports. When graduates complete the RTW program, they receive industry-recognized credentials with a National Career Readiness Certificate and an Alabama Certified Work Certificate.

"This really is a good program for all manufacturing, but it's especially great for automotive," according to Lynn. He believes that, "The most



important things about this are the four different modules of the CPT program: Safety, Quality Practices and Measurement, Manufacturing Processes and Production and Maintenance Awareness.

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Qualities that will elevate Alabama's workforce future are a strong work ethic, sound reading and math skills, good manufacturing knowledge, workers who are multi-skilled, flexible and adaptable to change, creative, inventive adept problem solvers, good communicators, and team players, he says. While that sounds like tall order, the workforce development plan has built in the training to back that up.

"We can be the first state in the U.S. to roll that out statewide," Lynn says. "It could be in all 24 colleges we have, and we can embed it in the dual enrollment programs we have in our high schools."

The need was so great it has been targeted by Scott Russo, talent acquisition manager, Mazda-Toyota

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—Jeff Lynn - Alabama Community College System



Manufacturing, U.S.A., Inc., who had a says he had a eureka moment when he saw Lynn's program. He told Lynn at the time that had he been the one to design a workforce program, it would have been precisely like the one now in place.

Russo is already eager for the program to run its first full cycle so that his team can start hiring the talent.

"MSSC's CPT certification provides students with a foundation in safety, quality, manufacturing processes and maintenance awareness. These are fundamental tools used in advanced manufacturing jobs," Russo says.

"This program allows industry to deeply engage with education to help tailor programs of study to meet industry needs. We expect a higher level of performance and skills coming into entry-level manufacturing jobs and employers have assurance in knowing that those hired with a CPT certification have the tools to succeed in their organization." He says, "Coming in with this base of knowledge learned in MSSC's CPT program shortens the learning curve and allows students to hit the ground running, reinforcing their confidence and ultimately, their success."

Lynn continues sharing his commitment to the project as he pushes the plan throughout the state. Not only is it growing in high school

with dual enrollment, adult education and even in corrections training, it's also attracting members of the military and the National Guard, with a growing number of soldiers going through the MSSC program. "On top of this," Lynn adds, "we're going into more apprenticeship programs."

Though typically these programs are at colleges, full-time students can become full-time workers, going to work three days a week and attending school two days.

"They start out with a great salary and get hands-on training while in college," Lynn says. "Students come out after five semesters with little or no debt. They have a great job starting at [\$50,000] or higher, and in three to five years, they are making six figures."

Statistics show by 2020, 65 percent of all jobs in the U.S. will require post-secondary education and training in addition to a high school diploma. Lynn is ready for that transition.

"All the things we are doing is because we are working directly with automotive OEMS and suppliers to be sure we are matching our programs to needs," Lynn says.

Ron Davis, head of the AAMA, has been instrumental in connecting Lynn with members and giving insight into what AAMA needs and how the program can be most successful.

Alabama Governor Kay Ivey, Jason Hoff, then-CEO of MBUSI, and Markus Schäfer, member of the Divisional Board of Mercedes-Benz Cars, Production and Supply Chain at the ground-breaking of the new electric battery plant.



"Frankly our job is to prepare a strong, qualified work force with soft skills, technical skills, competencies and behaviors that these companies desperately need," Lynn says. "We need a qualified pool of applicants for these companies to offer positions to."

Lynn has even more ambition, stepping up programs across the state and beginning others, including the FAME program.

"Work-based learning programs, such as FAME's Advanced Manufacturing Technician program, allows students to gain the fundamental skills needed in technical trades and to immediately apply those skills in real-world work

environments," according to Russo. "This not only reinforces learning and retention, but also provides the industry an opportunity to actively engage with students, teaching them the critical aspects of working in advanced manufacturing, such as safety, 5S, problem solving, teamwork, and other workplace behaviors required to succeed."

Lynn expects a fair amount of turnover in automotive as workers leave for new opportunities, and there's a constant need for backfill. He predicts a huge wave of new jobs.

"It's a great opportunity," Lynn says. "A lot of people don't realize what great careers are available in the

automotive industry. It's a very safe, clean environment that offers great careers with great benefits. Employees get health and retirement benefits and an opportunity to grow within that company. This is an opportunity for successful students coming out of two-year colleges to make a great career for themselves. I challenge our parents, teachers and counselors to really market those programs."

Lynn doesn't anticipate any lessening in demand for employees for at least five years.

"It's an amazing role Alabama is playing in automotive," Lynn says. "Once Mercedes decided to pick Alabama, it opened the eyes of the globe to the great work environment we have and our great two-year college system. With demand going up so quickly, we have to step up like never before. At the two-year college system, we have a new board and a new chancellor, and they're excited about supporting our automotive system across the state of Alabama." ■

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