Published on *Hillsborough Community College News* (https://news.hccfl.edu) on 10/18/17

HCC in the News: Meet the makers: Tampa Bay has good jobs in manufacturing — but they're having a hard time filling them

Terms:

Published Date and Time:
10/18/17

http://www.cltampa.com/news-views/local-news/article/20979756/meet-the-makers-tampa-bay-has-good-jobs-in-manufacturing-but-theyre-having-a-hard-time-filling-them [1]

News Organization:
Creative Loafing

It can be easy for a bright but unlucky young low-wage earner to feel eternally stuck in an $8.10-an-hour hell.

But local officials are hoping to offer them a way out of the rut: a potentially lucrative gig in the Tampa Bay area's burgeoning manufacturing sector.

The region is home to some 2,000 facilities that manufacture an array of goods — and they're not the factory jobs you may think of when you hear the word “manufacturing.”

“One of the things we realized pretty early on is that the general public still has some misconceptions about manufacturing careers,” said Ginger Clark, vice president of academic affairs at Hillsborough Community College.

On Thursday, October 17, the college is hosting its inaugural Made in Tampa Bay Expo [2]. In part, it's a way to show lay people just how much stuff is made in the Tampa Bay area — from medical devices to military jet parts. But really, Clark said, it's a way to get more young people to “take it seriously as a career option.”

“I think if you just ask most people about manufacturing careers, they would probably say it's redundant work, repetitive work... that's done in a very dirty and sometimes even dark environment and that there's little room for creativity and innovation,” she said. “And I think when you put those together, and it's just not very appealing.”

Mark Kemper, CEO of Engineering and Manufacturing Services Inc. (known commonly as EMS), will be on hand at the event to show a different side of the story. His firm uses 3D printing, among other methods, to create a wide variety of “short run” goods — all of which are produced in much smaller batches than are made in huge facilities overseas. That method works well for items like fidget spinners, which go out of vogue virtually as quickly as they appear. So he hopes to attract people who think differently about the field.

“We're typically looking for people that are open to this way of doing things,” he said. “A traditional manufacturer might not be, but a new young startup or just an inventor with ideas, this is going to be a very good option for them.”

Of course, there's the aforementioned talent gap, which the Hillsborough Board of County Commissioners has sought to help close by funding a free, three-week certification program through HCC (albeit on a limited first-come, first-served basis). The pay may not be as great at that level — $14-$15 bucks an hour, Clark estimates — but the college encourages those who earned certificates (the program is so new there aren't any yet) to come back over the years for subsequent programs so they can move up in the field.

“There's a lot of great opportunity for kids in their mid-20s to get serious about their [careers],” said Rick Concotelli, head of the Bay Area Manufacturers Association (BAMA).

And contrary to popular belief, he said, automation isn't necessarily obliterating demand for workers.

“Certainly, now, robotics have replaced some portion of the labor force in manufacturing. But when you talk about the portion of the positions that have been replaced, those positions were at lower skill sets,” Clark said.

But that also means there's kind of a disconnect between potential employers and prospective workers.

“Automation doesn't make jobs go away. It creates new jobs, and those people are shifted to those new opportunities,” Concotelli said. “Unfortunately it means that we need specialized training for those [positions] and so there's that constant effort that we put into our not only primary education facilities, but also our secondary education, the technical colleges and the private education like Aviation Academy and some of those other facilities. We have to be very aggressive in letting those folks know what exact [technological training] we need for those students to graduate with to make them viable employees and give them the tools that they need to move forward as we move on with technological advancement.”

Thursday's event takes place from 3-7 p.m. at the Hillsborough Community College campus off Dale Mabry (4001 W. Tampa Bay Blvd.)

Language:
English

Source URL: https://news.hccfl.edu/news/hcc-news-meet-makers-tampa-bay-has-good-jobs-manufacturing-%E2%80%94-theyre-having-hard-time-filling

Links:
[1] http://www.cltampa.com/news-views/local-news/article/20979756/meet-the-makers-tampa-bay-has-good-jobs-in-manufacturing-but-theyre-having-a-hard-time-filling-them
[2] http://www.bama-fl.org/event-2610561