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HCC in the News: Teens Get Ahead in Engineering, Technology

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Manufacturing Alliance hopes exposure will spur interest in STEM careers

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Twenty Hillsborough County teens are learning about 3D printing, prototyping, manipulation of robotic arms, and computer programming at Engineering Technology Camp this summer.

The week-long camp offered by FLATE (Florida Advanced Technological Education Center) takes place at the Brandon campus of Hillsborough Community College (HCC). It is partly sponsored by the County-supported Manufacturing Alliance.

The idea is to expose the 11 girls and nine boys to engineering and technology, with hopes it will inspire them to consider careers in those fields. FLATE also emphasizes the business side of manufacturing.

Nathaniel Calderon's parents told him about the camp. The Foundation Christian Academy 10th-grader is interested primarily in music and art, but he is eager to learn more about technology: "I got super excited when I heard about 3D printing," says Nathaniel, 15. "I was like, 'Yes!'"



Funding from Hillsborough County government will cover costs for about half of the students attending the camp. The teens receive an introduction to careers in manufacturing, tour an advanced manufacturing facility, and learn how STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) studies can lead to lucrative careers.

"Coming to this camp is a great opportunity to decide what you want to do," says Anika Shah, 13, a Randall Middle School 8th-grader. "There's going to be a lot of jobs in robotics and programming, and we should further our knowledge in it."

The camp is another way the County and Manufacturing Alliance are addressing a "skills gap" in the industry. With veteran manufacturers retiring or nearing retirement, and with many students choosing liberal arts over STEM subjects, not enough young people are aware of the many career opportunities available in manufacturing.

Just as elsewhere in the country, it's a significant challenge in Hillsborough County, which has a robust manufacturing industry fueled by a growing high-tech sector, favorable business climate, and strategic location.

To address the shortage of workers, the Manufacturing Alliance is reaching out to possible job candidates, touting the industry's potentially well-paying careers and moderate training costs. The Alliance coordinates with educators, employers, and government officials in an effort to provide talented job seekers.

Here are ways the Manufacturing Alliance helps people learn about and train for the industry:

- In July, HCC will open a testing center at the Brandon campus to make it easier for aspiring welders to receive American Welding Society certifications.
- The Alliance in 2016 partnered with the Hillsborough County School District to launch training programs at select high schools. As part of that effort, the County and its partners installed high-tech fabricating machines at Armwood High.
- Invests in new equipment and ensures curriculum aligns with industry standards in the HCC Brandon campus' Engineering Technology program.
- Recognizes National Manufacturing Day in October at area middle and high schools.
- A marketing campaign, including development of a website, to encourage students to consider manufacturing careers.

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