Milwaukee Area Technical College Fills the Gap

Milwaukee Area Technical College, known as MATC, is a comprehensive technical college that offers educational and training opportunities and services to its diverse community through collaboration with partners to advance the lives of its students.

MATC's goal is to train students for the skills needed to fill jobs in the Milwaukee area and beyond. It offers 170 career-centered programs, including degrees, diplomas and apprenticeships. Within the precision machining field, MATC offers programs for CNC Swiss turning, CNC set-up operations, CNC programming and a two-year technical program for Tool & Die.

"Every program that the college offers has an advisory committee with representatives from companies in those industries," says Tom Olson, MATC machining instructor. "These committees help guide our programs and they grow and change as the community's needs change. In my 25 years here, I've seen the programs change with the natural transitions in the field."

According to Mr. Olson, the average student in MATC's multiple precision machining programs is between 26- to 28-years-old and is looking to strengthen skills. Prospective program participants must pass a basic pre-entry exam to begin the programs.

"We have students from a variety of backgrounds and ages in our programs," says Mr. Olson. "Overall, we like to have students who are motivated to learn and improve."

The programs instruct on basic machine and problem-solving skills.

"In the machine labs we can teach students how to set up a machine, change tools, read a micrometer and adjust equipment," explains Mr. Olson. "But we can't teach production because it's not economically possible to run production in a school setting."

MATC machining students learn the value of the equipment and tooling, and tour a machine shop.

"I tell the students that when they're on the machine shop tours, they should ask any questions that they have since they're there to learn. The tour is a great way for them to see real work environments," says Mr. Olson. "We're still facing that stigma of shops being dark, dirty places. But in reality, when you visit a modern machine shop, they're bright and clean."

MATC's machining program advisory committees have several local PMPA members on them, helping guide the program, allowing their shops to be toured, hiring program graduates and continuing training for their current employees.

"We have a great relationship with PMPA that we look forward to continuing," comments Mr. Olson. "Local PMPA members help us send students to trade shows and conferences as well as help out with regular program needs. They regularly call and ask for me to send them our graduates."

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PMPA Member Embraces Community Engagement

Dan Murphy, regional sales manager and product expert with REM Sales, spoke to the 180 students in attendance and described the technologies and how they are used. "A lot of orthopedic and surgical implant components are made using Swiss machining technologies like those here at Precision Plus," he says. "I was really impressed when about eight of the students attending, all of whom were in the highest ranking of their graduating class, came up to me to tell me two of them were considering a career in biomedical engineering. The visibility and importance of precision machining in their future field was easily seen by these students."

Darlene Miller, CEO of Permac Industries in Burnsville, Minn., had a message for the female students in attendance. "We actually have an advantage in this industry. We think differently. Critically. Our asking 'why?' leads to improvements and efficiencies in processes. Our attention to detail helps minimize mistakes. But our passion helps keep everyone motivated and working toward the same goal.

"After working in manufacturing, I moved into sales, and bought an interest in the company. I grew my share and grew my company. Today we supply leading companies around the world. I was recently honored as one of 122 Women in Manufacturing by the Manufacturing Institute," Ms. Miller continues. "Another honoree was a young woman who operates a CNC machine and designed an assembly process for her employer. I don't know of any place with so many opportunities for a career, recognition and to make a difference as precision machining and advanced manufacturing."

Mr. Reader summarizes his take on the career panel, "I think this year's Manufacturing Career Panel was a success. Despite our lovely Wisconsin weather, we engaged almost 200 students, including a valedictorian and several others at the top of their class. The best and brightest showed up. While many of them still plan on attending college, and we hope that they do, they now are aware that they have another choice besides going deep into debt. They now know that they can earn while they learn, gain a skill as they get an education and integrate their manufacturing experiences into their engineering studies."

"Learn your skills locally, but understand that they are needed globally," he concludes. "Your highest and best use may just be becoming a skilled craftsman in high-demand globally. Even the Swiss, who are known for their culture of manufacturing expertise and quality, are trying to find more manufacturing talent. A career in precision machining can be part of a dual path of work and education. A dual track leads to a lifetime of career success."

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MATC fills the education and training gaps in cooperation with PMPA members by educating new machinists and training current employees in increasing skills and knowledge.

"I would encourage other PMPA members to talk with area technical colleges to work together for well-trained employees. We fill open slots during classes for continued training of industry members who want to upgrade their skills," says Mr. Olson. "Local chapter members can work together to arrange training with local schools to share costs. There are many options that technical colleges, like MATC, can offer to PMPA members who are looking to have well-trained employees."

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