

Coming in early, staying late

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Instructor Jim King, right, answers a question about a training module from Chris Studt of Laurel during the Manufacturing Matters class at Ivy Tech Community College. / Louise Ronald/Palladium-Item

Manufacturing Matters

- Applicants for training must qualify by taking work readiness and drug tests. Those who do qualify receive a scholarship to cover the cost of training.
- Partner companies pay a \$1,000 annual fee and agree to refund half the cost of training after a newly hired participant successfully completes 90 days of employment.
- For more information about how to become a participant or a partner, go online to www.manufacturingmatters.info.

Members of the first Manufacturing Matters cohort are approaching the halfway mark in their training

to become certified production technicians (CPT).

Twelve people are enrolled in the intensive course that meets five mornings a week at Ivy Tech Community College in Richmond.

By the time the class ends on Jan. 10, participants will have had 32 hours of instruction in teamwork and other “soft” skills and 140 hours of preparation for the examination to earn the national certification.

CPTs must show mastery of a wide variety of skills including blueprint reading, precision measurement, quality systems, logistics and inventory, machinery processes and more.

Jim King had to take the exam to qualify as instructor for the course. “It’s a difficult test,” he said. “I don’t know anybody ... that’s come away with 100 percent across the board.”

King is with the cohort every morning except Thursday, when WorkOne does team-building, problem-solving and communication exercises with the group. On a typical morning, King begins with 45-60 minutes of instruction, after which participants work at their own pace on a series of training modules on the computer.

The class is scheduled from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., but King said that when he comes in about 8 a.m., the room already is occupied. “I’m never the first one,” he said.

Participants also stay after class. The room is available to them throughout the day, and they use it. “You can walk by at 2 in the afternoon and they’ll still be here,” King said. “There are always people here — always.”

Bob Harding of Connersville said he routinely shows up 45 minutes before the class starts and stays two hours after it ends.

Harding's employment background is in teaching and library work. "I've never spent one day in a manufacturing environment," he admitted. But he was without a job when he heard about Manufacturing Matters on a cable television program with Connersville Mayor Leonard Urban.

Urban urged viewers to think about taking the course. "Why not? What have you got to lose?" Harding remembers Urban saying. Harding decided to give it a try.

"It's one of the most difficult things in my life I've ever had to do," said Harding. Being new to manufacturing, he said he had to learn a whole new vocabulary before tackling the class content. Still, he's pleased with his progress so far. "I'm ahead of the curve," he said. "I'm very diligent. I'm very methodical. But it just takes time."

King is impressed by the motivation of the students. "As a matter of fact," he said, "I hate to use the word 'students.'" The participants treat the class more like a job, he said. "They've demonstrated that commitment."

Darin Dubbs is director of human resources for Primex Plastics Corp., one of the founding partners in Manufacturing Matters. Partners are given first access to hiring graduates of the class. "In order for someone to go through that process," Dubbs said, "they have to have the work ethic we're looking for."

Primex won't have to look far in one case. Wilmi Vizcaino was working third shift at Primex when he applied for the course.

Vizcaino has a degree from industrial engineering from a two-year college in his native Dominican Republic. He moved to the area after marrying a woman originally from Richmond. "When I heard about this training, I thought it would be a great chance to improve my communication skills and learn new ways to do things here — just to get up-to-date," he said.

But coming to class straight from an eight-hour shift was rough. After the course started, Vizcaino applied for and got a position in quality at Primex. Dubbs said the new position gave the company a chance to adjust Vizcaino's hours, since his work isn't directly tied to the production schedule. Vizcaino now works from 1-9 p.m. "so I can come in fresh in the morning."

Randy Tucker of Centerville isn't so lucky. He works third shift and gets off at 6:30 a.m. Some mornings, he doesn't have time for breakfast before class. And he tries to leave by 1 p.m. "I've got to get home to get some sleep," he said.

Tucker is prepared to keep on squeezing meals and sleep into his busy schedule for a few more weeks. "I think I can do it," he said. "I came this far. I'm going to finish it."

Mary Frazier of Richmond is able to come in early and stay late. In fact, she said that with two preschool-aged grandchildren and no computer at home, she has to. "When I'm home, I'm grandma," she said.

Like Harding, Frazier is new to manufacturing. Most of her work experience is in food service management. She's used to dealing with computers and math, "but the precision instruments and the engineering parts are totally new," she said. "It's a totally different world, but it's very interesting. I'm excited."

Frazier isn't concerned about being a woman in the course. "I have worked in a field that is male-dominated, so it doesn't really bother me," she said. She's more concerned that her age — she thinks she's the oldest member of the class — could affect her chances of getting a job after earning her certification.

"But hopefully, I'll know enough to offset that," Frazier said. "There's a vast wealth of knowledge being learned here."

King agreed. "When one of these people walks in with this certificate," he said, "they've worked hard to get it."

"We all seem to be really dedicated to getting the certificate," said Dylan McLemore of Richmond. "As a matter of fact, I hope to see some of these guys and work with them (in the future)," he said.

"I can rely on them."

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