



Submitted photo

Waukesha County Automation Systems Technology students use robots in the Generac Lab in the college's Integrated Manufacturing Center.

New apprenticeship program launches at WCTC

Mechatronics technicians support robotics, automation for modern manufacturing

By Ashley Haynes
Freeman Staff

PEWAUKEE — The Department of Workforce Development highlighted the launch of a new Mechatronics Technician Registered Apprenticeship program for Wisconsin manufacturers during an information session on Monday at the Waukesha County Technical College Generac Integrated Manufacturing Lab.

The Generac Lab is part of the Integrated Manufacturing Center and opened in January 2016. The building is used to support the automation system technology program, the industrial maintenance technology program, and the engineering and electrical apprenticeship programs.

"We wanted to get all those programs that interact so much in the real world all into one building," said Mike Shiels, dean of WCTC's School of Applied Technologies.

Shiels hopes that the new mechatronics apprenticeship program will start in the fall with around 12 students. The program is driven by employers. Companies will identify employees that they believe are skilled enough to advance to a higher skill level. These employees will earn their paychecks, credentials as journeyworkers and more training through the program. College credit will also be earned.

"It's a great workforce

development tool," said Shiels. "It's really advancing the skill set of the employees at the company. They're investing in both the company's and the employee's futures."

The DWD's Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards sought to address the skills gap and training needs in advanced manufacturing by developing the Mechatronics Technician Registered Apprenticeship.

The bureau is partnered with various sized manufacturers from Waukesha County and the region including: Acieta, LLC, Eaton, GE Healthcare, John Deere, KHS USA, Inc., Konnex, Midwest Engineering Systems, Quad/Graphics, Signicast, SMC Corporation and Waukesha Metal Products.

Troubleshooting is vital

"Manufacturing is ever evolving with technical complexity that requires our technicians to understand mechanical, electrical, hydraulic, pneumatic, computer and control engineering," said Jeff Clark, president and CEO of Waukesha Metal Products.

Mechatronics technicians support robotics and automation technologies used in modern manufacturing processes for electrical, mechanical and electronic systems. Workers typically troubleshoot, operate and debug industrial computer and communications systems. These highly skilled technicians

may machine metal and other materials, fabricate parts and weld components. At some companies, they also work in collaborative environments documenting work performed while supporting facilities, utilities and grounds.

"The ability to troubleshoot systems involved in manufacturing and process control is critical for this occupation," said Shiels.

Within the Integrated Manufacturing Center, there are state-of-the-art tools that allow students and workers to learn with ease. The actual Generac Lab houses 16 robots and other high-tech automation. There is also a manufacturing cell within the lab, a CNC machine fully integrated with a robot, and robotic welders.

Mechatronics Technician Registered Apprenticeship training is a 5-year program of no less than 10,000 hours, including 864 hours of related technical instruction available at WCTC and other Wisconsin technical colleges across the state starting this fall. Apprentices who successfully complete training hours and competency requirements will earn a nationally recognized industry credential and technical college credits that may be applied towards an associate's degree.

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