

Wanted: Workers

Eight Valley-region manufacturers join apprentice program to train employees for skilled positions.

By **MARK R. MADLER** Staff Reporter

Thomas Mundy has several reasons for participating in a U.S. Department of Labor sponsored apprenticeship program, but the main one is the lack of trained machinists in the local labor pool to work at his company, **Superior Thread Rolling Co.** in Arleta.

Mundy said that his company's tool room attendant wants to become a machinist and the California Advanced Manufacturing Apprenticeship Collaborative, or CAMAC program, will help in giving some clarity on that decision. Some of the skills his employee would learn include blueprint reading, geometric dimensioning, tolerance control and machine operation.

"They get much more well-rounded if they go through this type of apprenticeship program," Mundy said. "They do not get pigeonholed."

Superior Thread Rolling is among eight manufacturers in the San Fernando, Santa Clarita and Simi valleys taking part in the program, which combines classroom training with paid, on-the-job experience. The collaborative is made up of the Labor Department, **Goodwill Southern California**, community colleges and **ToolingU**, a nonprofit providing online industrial manufacturing training and development.

Apprenticeship programs have traditionally been in the industrial trades, such as machinists, electricians and construction. Today these programs have expanded into other careers, such as solar turbine maintenance, meat cutters, installing stone or ceramic tile and early childhood education.

Manufacturing jobs are ripe for apprentice programs because they are difficult to fill due to a lack of trained applicants. The Bureau of Labor Statistics forecasts that machinist jobs are expected to grow by 10 percent from 2014 to 2024 even as more automated equipment is used. Machinists will be needed "to set up, monitor, and maintain these automated systems," the bureau said in its forecast.

At the end of the federal government's fiscal year on Sept. 30, there were a little more than 500,000 active participants in more than 21,000 apprenticeship programs across the nation, according to the Labor Department.

California leads the nation with number of active participants, which reached more than 74,000 last year, according to the state's Department of Industrial Relations.

The program that the Valley region employers have joined launched on Feb. 27 when representatives from the Labor Department and **John Dunn**, the project director for the collaborative, signed off on agreements to establish it.

Tracy DiFilippis, a sector strategy manager with Goodwill Southern California, said the first apprenticeships will number about 15 among the eight companies and will range from one year to three years in length.

Goodwill's contribution to the program is handling the paperwork, including tracking hours and assisting the companies to find potential apprentices.

"We have eight employers who are signed, sealed and delivered and ready to begin the program," DiFilippis said.

DiFilippis said the adoption of apprentice programs is a bit of a throwback but that they are now being updated. "It is an old-school way of earning and learning and training employees," she added.

Traditionally, these programs could either be based on time – setting a number of hours for the apprentice to work – or competency by having the apprentice demonstrate certain skills. Current programs can be a hybrid of both, DiFilippis said.

The most critical factor for success of an apprenticeship is getting past preconceived notions people have about how apprenticeship programs work and that modern technology can be utilized.

ToolingU, for instance, will provide a phone



PHOTOS BY THOMAS WASPER

Factory Floor: Thomas Mundy and technician at Superior Thread Rolling, an Arleta company participating in apprentice program.

app that tracks the hours and machining skills of the apprentices and then the employers verify that information.

"Then the record keeping is digitized," DiFilippis said.

Custom skill sets

The eight manufacturing companies are now in the process of selecting their apprentices to partake in the program.

Tom Molnar, president at **Lee's Enterprise**, a Chatsworth manufacturer of precision parts for commercial and military aircraft, said the company is looking at bringing in up to three apprentices. Two would be internal candidates and the third would come from either College of the Canyons in Santa Clarita or through Goodwill.

Molnar hopes that the online training done through ToolingU would be accomplished at the company, he added.

"We have to get ourselves ramped on a few of those things," Molnar said.

This isn't the first go around with apprenticeships for Molnar and Lee's Enterprise.

About 20 years ago, the company had been part of a program through the Los Angeles chapter of the National Tooling and Machining Association. But that program fell apart because the funding was spotty.

"It operated grant by grant and it was tough to sustain," Molnar explained.

The company also finds workers by bringing in students from Van Nuys High School as interns for one day a week over a 12-week period to give them real-world experience and to see if manufacturing is something they want to pursue as a career.

The second in command on the shop floor came out of such an internship, Molnar said.

"We have had good success from working with programs like this," he added.

Fralock, a manufacturer of components used in the semiconductor, aerospace and medical device markets in Valencia, is using apprenticeships for the first time.

Bobbi Booher, chief financial officer, learned about the CAMAC program a few months back at a meeting where she met DiFilippis and thought that what Goodwill was



Teamwork: Bobbi Booher, Eric Jensen and Miguel Morales at Fralock in Valencia.

creating sounded like a wonderful opportunity.

"We are ready to take the leap with them," Booher said.

Eric Jensen, the plant manager at Fralock, said that as manufacturing evolves there are increasingly complex processes requiring higher skill sets. What the company will do is determine the skills that employees will need in the future and then see how the CAMAC program can fit into that by creating specific job descriptions.

"It is a very flexible program surprisingly for the federal government," Jensen said.

Administrative burden

Mundy at Superior Thread said a major attraction of CAMAC is that the employer doesn't bear the burden of paperwork and administration. That's in contrast to most such government-supported training programs.

"You either have to hire some person to administer an apprenticeship contract or you have to trust the apprentice is going to self-manage themselves," Mundy said. "That just doesn't happen."

Goodwill Southern California got involved with the apprenticeship collaborative after

Dunn, the director, got wind of a program the nonprofit did with **Hawker Pacific Aerospace**, in Sun Valley. In that case Goodwill had coordinated a skill certification process with the Labor Department.

The two groups began talking in October and by the following month had an event for National Apprenticeship Week at College of the Canyons. By that time, several manufacturers already expressed interest in taking part in the collaborative's program, DiFilippis said.

Like Mundy, Booher, at Fralock, was pleased about how Goodwill would take on the administrative functions.

"Running a business and making parts takes a lot of time," Booher said. "Having that background stuff taken care of in advance makes it more attractive."

For his part, Mundy thinks that people who want to learn new skills and have an impact will flourish in the type of environment created by an apprenticeship.

"If I provide that learning environment, my employees will want to stay, they will want to continue learning," Mundy said. "They don't get that everywhere they go."