

# State Bets On Training Program To Fill Open Positions

by Jack Kramer | Jul 15, 2019

OLD SAYBROOK, CT — Kathryn Mica always had a passion for art but it wasn't until she joined a regional partnership program that she turned her passion into a job.

The 25-year-old East Haddam resident has been working since April as a welder-fabricator at Sound Manufacturing in Old Saybrook, after graduating a welding school program under the direction of the Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (MPI).

Sound Manufacturing, Inc., is a woman-owned business that employs more than 80 workers, 10 of whom are graduates of the MPI program.

The company, which operates out of an 80,000-square-foot new facility near the Old Saybrook train station, fabricates precision sheet metal for various applications, such as industrial machinery, security, lighting, and telecommunications including landscaping equipment under the brand name Monster power equipment.



Kathryn Mica | JACK KRAMER/CTNEWSJUNKIE

State Treasurer Shawn T. Wooden joined leaders from the Eastern CT Workforce Investment Board and the Workforce Alliance at Sound Manufacturing on Friday to put a spotlight on Connecticut's manufacturing workforce needs and MPI. The program has placed 1,400 new workers in jobs.

In response to July's Connecticut Economic Digest, which indicates a growing need for workers in manufacturing, Wooden called on business leaders and workforce investment partners to discuss further workforce investment opportunities and economic empowerment for Connecticut's under- and unemployed.

With more than 35% of the state's manufacturing workforce over the age of 54, manufacturing will be among the hardest hit sectors by Connecticut's aging workforce, Wooden said.

Knowing these impending labor shortfalls, the state's economic report underscores the importance of having an adequate pipeline to help train incoming workers to replace those who will eventually retire, Wooden said.

In 2015, in response to an increased need for skilled workers in the Groton-New London area, local manufacturing employers, area schools, and the workforce investment board launched the MPI.

"Workforce development is essential to growing Connecticut's economy," Wooden said. "By investing in the right

priorities and fostering more private-public partnerships like the Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative in Eastern Connecticut, we can both grow our skilled workforce and the economic security of more Connecticut families, while also meeting the needs of more employers that are proud to call Connecticut home.”

“The MPI program has enabled Sound Manufacturing to grow our business,” Kelli-Marie Vallieres, president and CEO of Sound Manufacturing, said.

Vallieres noted that two of the MPI graduates, including Mica, are the first two female welders ever hired by the company.



Kelli-Marie Vallieres, president and CEO of Sound Manufacturing talks to Treasurer Shawn Wooden | JACK KRAMER/CTNEWSJUNKIE

And the job, according to Mica, is outstanding.

“I love it,” she said, saying her co-workers and bosses have all been supportive. Asked about the wages, Mica responded: “It’s good pay, frankly better than I expected. I couldn’t be happier.”

“The (MPI) program’s demand-drive approach has successfully provided us with a reliable source of trained and motivated people looking for a long-term career. It’s a win-win for everyone,” Vallieres said.

The program, according to Mark Hill, chief operating officer of the Eastern CT Workforce

Investment Board (EWIB), has “proven its capability to raise the baseline of our labor force’s competencies in skills aligned to the hiring needs of employers.”

The program has placed more than 1,400 individuals in jobs in the past three years, Hill added.

Officials state the MPI program has achieved a 92% job placement rate among its training program graduates since its inception.

Since inception, more than 8,100 people have applied to the program, much higher, officials state, than originally anticipated.

Candidates accepted into the program must pass a skill assessment test and then go to skill training classes taught by regional colleges at various technical labs.

The largest overall employer of MPI graduates is General Dynamics, the parent company of Electric Boat.

The need for such workers is obvious to those who monitor workforce issues in Connecticut state.