

Invar needed skilled workers

Partnership means progress

Intel
April 18/98
p. 8

GREEN, Lori

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The Intelligencer

In today's global economy, business and industry must strive to remain current and successful against often overwhelming obstacles.

Rather than being daunted by this challenge, the greater Quinte area has risen to the challenge by initiating creative community partnerships.

One such success story is the recent alliance formed with Invar Manufacturing Ltd. of Batawa, Loyalist Training and Development Centre and Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC).

The three partners developed a manufacturing operator pre-employment program for the Batawa firm.

The program content was co-designed by Invar Manufacturing and Loyalist's development centre and funded by HRDC.

Invar has been in operation since 1987 and is a division of the Linamar Group of companies. It employs a highly-skilled workforce in the precision machining and manufacturing industry.

The company historically has provided a wide array of complex components such as hydraulic cylinders, assemblies and systems for the defence, commercial and aircraft aerospace, transportation and nuclear energy markets.

However, in the past three years its market has changed. Since 1996, a significant percentage of Invar's manufacturing involved producing quality automotive parts for industry.

The shift in markets prompted Invar to seek more skilled workers.

Frank Hasengratz, chief executive officer of the Guelph-based parts supplier for Linamar Corp., acknowledged that there's a severe shortage of skilled trades or shop floor workers.

"Canada is not training people properly (for manufacturing jobs)," he said. "We are not prepared for the future and (if we continue) we will not be able to compete. If you don't have manufacturing you don't have anything, there is nothing to sell, distribute or service."

Invar has forecasted a growth in business over the next two or three years and this growth, said Hasengratz, has necessitated the hiring and training of additional manufacturing operators to meet increased production requirements.

The recent training program was held to prepare its workers in the areas of machine shop knowledge, quality assurance,

safety and team work and communication.

The initiative was made possible through proactive measures adopted by Human Resources Development Canada. The government agency provided the funding for industry-specific training for candidates that were eligible for Unemployment Insurance, offering employment to a group of individuals who displayed the initiative and drive to increase their skill base.

"It was a good partnership," said HRDC's Liz Gregory.

"All of the participants of the program are still there so it obviously worked well for them and I spoke with senior staff at Invar and they are pleased with the graduates of the program."

Lori Green, a program participant, said the training program paid dividends for her.

"So many times I thought I wouldn't be able to make it through because it was so different from my previous job, but the encouragement and support from the instructors and other participants was wonderful. I'm so glad I continued the training because I'm really enjoying my job here," said Green.

Douglas Stack, another participant, was also positive about the training program.

"It certainly increased my confidence level going into my new position," he said. "I feel it has increased my chances for advancement, making this a career and not just a job."

Loyalist's training and development centre developed and delivered the training program which provided Invar with skilled employees.

The centre's Chuck O'Malley said the college prides itself on being able to deliver customized training specific to each of its client's needs.

"The positive response to this particular partnership led to a second and now a third phase of training with Loyalist Training and Development Centre," he noted.

The third course will be a six-week session for up to 18 people. Those interested in participating should contact HRDC in Trenton.

The program will run from May 11 to June 19 and include such topics as blueprint reading (mechanical), health and safety, team and communication skills, precision measurement, statistical process control and geometric dimensioning and tolerancing.

"Nothing is more rewarding than a win-win conclusion for everyone involved," said O'Malley.