

OKAY INDUSTRIES AND ACMT

Hartford, CT



CONNECTICUT MANUFACTURERS BUILDING A TALENT PIPELINE FOR YOUNG ADULTS

Two Hartford area manufacturers find their next generation of workers from an unconventional source: young adults who are often out of work and out of school. Okay Industries and Advanced Composites & Metalforming Technologies (ACMT) are investing in their younger workforce and partnering with community organizations to create a pipeline of talented, young workers.

With 200 employees in New Britain and Berlin, Connecticut, Okay Industries has been in business for over 100 years. More than a third of their 52 recent hires are under the age of 30.

ACMT has been in business since 1986 and employs about 85 people, about 40% of whom are under the age of 30.

Okay Industries: A Long-Term Strategy for Building Their Workforce

It can take many years of experience and ongoing learning to become highly skilled, senior-level machinists. By developing relationships with local schools, vocational, community, and four-year colleges, Okay Industries can actively recruit, train, and mentor the next generation of workers to ensure they are prepared as their senior workers retire. The manufacturing firm not only hires directly from local schools, but participates in advisory groups to offer ongoing feedback so that educational programs align with in-demand skills for employers.

Independently and through AMEP, Okay Industries partners with organizations that serve and train young adults such as the Hartford Job Corps Academy, CCAT Manufacturing Careers Program, and Capital Workforce Partners - Best Chance Program. Okay is eager to train new workers and give everyone a chance to secure a good manufacturing job. For example, it offers internships to help workers with no manufacturing experience understand the industry and learn on the shop floor. Additionally, it partnered with the Capital Workforce Partners to hire six formerly incarcerated workers, half of whom have stayed on and moved up into CNC or quality positions.

One of many manufacturers in the region facing similar talent pipeline challenges, the importance of retaining workers cannot be overstated. Okay has found that their workforce investments contribute to happy, loyal and productive employees, which in turn, enables the company to develop quality products for their customers and continue their growth.

// Okay Industries and ACMT are great examples of manufacturers committed to growing their companies with local talent. They see the benefit to their bottom line and to the 'bottom line' of their employees who earn good wages. **//**

- **Paula S. Gilberto**, President and CEO of United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut and Chair of Workforce Solutions Collaborative of Metro Hartford.

ACMT: Getting the Word Out about Careers in Manufacturing

Aerospace manufacturer Advanced Composites and Metalforming Technologies (ACMT) knows there is a skills gap in their industry and with long-term workers ready to retire, it's working with The Hartford Job Corps Academy, Capital Workforce Partners, vocational schools and community colleges to develop a new workforce.

ACMT has developed a unique partnership with local high schools to expose young people to the opportunities in manufacturing. After the completing of Pathways Academy for Technology and Design, ACMT offered six students a six-week internship where they had the opportunity to rotate through different areas of the company to learn more about the industry and potential career paths.

Although the program was a success in educating a new generation to manufacturing jobs, one major obstacle that the manufacturing firm faced as students graduated was transportation. With inadequate public transportation, in addition to a lack of access to their own cars, young workers struggled to get to work on time. However, a key element of ACMT's strategy is flexibility. Providing training, mentoring, and a variety of role rotations to find the right fit may take some time, but these investments benefit young workers and the company in the long-term.

By developing partnerships to expose more people to the industry, the company has succeeded in expanding its pool for new hires. ACMT is looking beyond the often male-dominated industry standard and is committed to diversifying its workforce. Currently it's outpacing the industry average for female representation by 11%.



One Participant's Success

"I was not only given the opportunity to learn a trade and how to manage my money responsibly, but also how to improve my communication skills, work better with others, and how to persevere.

These are lessons I am never going to forget," said Matthew Gabbey.

At 26, Matthew is a CNC Machine Operator at Okay Industries looking to further his education and continue to progress in his career path. Matthew connected with Hartford Job Corps Academy's Advanced Manufacturing program two years ago, and from there he earned his National Career Readiness Certificate through the Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology (CCAT) Manufacturing Careers Program. These credentials have helped him get his foot in the door at Okay, where he started as a Quality Control Inspector.

Matthew has been, and continues to be, the beneficiary of a manufacturing industry that is not only thriving and growing, but is actively seeking new ways to find and engage younger workers and advance their careers.

THE EMPLOYER'S PERSPECTIVE

"When we find someone who is willing to work and learn and shows an interest in a career in manufacturing, they can move up pretty quickly," says Kathy Cabral, Human Resource Manager of Okay Industries. "It just makes sense to invest in the proven employees that we have and promote from within. We are also fortunate to have senior people with decades of experience who can share their skills and knowledge, serving as mentors to our younger employees."

|| One of the reasons ACMT has been so successful is that their leadership are champions for their workforce, they invest in people and pipelines and as a result they get a stronger workforce and a better product. ||

- Lisa Sanders, Former ACMT Human Resources Director.



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