



Community colleges across the state are working to train new workers and the existing labor force for jobs of the future. Beaufort County Community College partners with manufacturing companies to create apprenticeship programs for trade jobs like journeymen to help.

FOCUS ON: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

LABOR OF LOVE

Education, economic development and jobs services build the future workforce.

When the Canada-based Spinrite Services LLC craft-yarn manufacturer announced plans to move its packaging operations from Washington, N.C., to a new facility in Georgia last September, about 30 employees faced moving or losing their jobs.

Eight years ago, Spinrite acquired Caron International Inc., a division of National Spinning Co., which has

maintained headquarters in Beaufort County for decades. Some of the 30 affected employees had worked there for decades, too. A team of Beaufort County economic and workforce development professionals stepped in to help keep those people employed.

"We have a list of the employees who are losing their jobs, and some of them have been there for 10, 20 or 30 years," says Martyn Johnson, director of Beaufort County Economic Development. "Their credentials begin and end at their high school diplomas, and the way business and industry [are] starting to skew toward skilled labor needs, they are going to need a higher level of qualifications or certificates to

prove they have the skills they need to find a comparable job."

A good resume will help workers demonstrate they have the technical ability to perform at a high level, but for those who have been in the same job for most of their adult lives, keeping resumes polished sounds like a waste of time.

This is a common issue modern employees are facing. The need to retrain, update skills and find new areas of expertise is common as jobs become more technological or move altogether.

Beaufort County is one of five counties that make up the Region Q Workforce Development Board, one

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Guilford Technical Community College Aviation Manufacturing Quick Careers Program

The composite technology program is a three-week course that instructs laymen and skilled professionals about the fundamentals of advanced-composite fabrication, repairs and processes. Advanced composites are used in many applications and continue to be a primary consideration when replacing other structural components because of their great strength-to-weight advantages.

Fayetteville Technical Community College Collision Repair and Refinishing Technology Program

Graduates of the Collision Repair and Refinishing Technology program earn certifications and are qualified for entry-level employment in automotive dealerships and independent repair shops or through self-employment as collision repair and refinishing technicians.

Pitt Community College Advanced Manufacturing Institute

The AMI is a short-term training program in advanced manufacturing that includes training in Manufacturing Concepts, Math for Manufacturing, Lean Six Sigma Yellow Belt, OSHA 10, Problem Solving and Working Smart skills in the industry. The AMI is part of the Regional Advanced Manufacturing Pipeline (RAMP) program.

Lenoir Community College Customized Training Program

CTP provides education, training and support services for new, expanding and existing business and industry in Lenoir, Jones and Greene counties. CTP is designed to make a difference in a company's bottom line, whether an organization is creating jobs, investing in new machinery and equipment, or streamlining processes for efficiency.

NC Community Colleges BioNetwork Biowork certificate program

The BioWork certificate program teaches students the foundational skills needed to begin a career as a process technician for biotechnology, pharmaceutical or chemical-manufacturing companies. Process technicians are responsible for the production of chemical and pharmaceutical products. It is available at several community colleges throughout the state.

of 23 entities across North Carolina funded by the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. These organizations help people or businesses access programs that connect talent to jobs.

Region Q deployed a busload of computers to Beaufort County, where Johnson's workforce development team has arranged to help the displaced workers from Spinrite write resumes. The local NCWorks career center will provide services and resources, too.

"We want people to go through our system, and we want them to know there is a huge amount of support here for them," says Sara Watson, director of customized training and apprenticeships at Beaufort County Community College and a member of the county's workforce development team.

Working together

Five years ago, Johnson left a job he held for 25 years with the N.C. Department of Commerce to lead Beaufort County's economic development efforts. As a new resident, he visited businesses and industries to learn their needs and discovered that a skilled workforce was sorely lacking. He formed a coalition of partners to help build a local workforce, aid Beaufort County Community College in helping existing workers improve their skills, and assist NCWorks in advertising jobs and preparing potential workers for hiring.

"Through this coalition, we have been able to provide resources to our businesses and residents and also raise the visibility of the skills needed for a job," Johnson says. "No longer can people just show up and expect to start working. They need access to additional resources, like high school career programs, certificate and apprenticeship opportunities through our community college, and they need to participate in NCWorks' programs."

Almost everyone on Johnson's team has made their home and built their career in eastern North Carolina. As life-

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long educators, economic development professionals and workforce specialists, they've been focused on the same goals but operated independently until Johnson brought them together.

"Before, our programs were in their own silos, and everyone was doing their own thing," Watson says. "I think it's brilliant to have everyone interacting with each other. We are a united front before industries and businesses."

Back to the future

Beaufort County is not the only area in the state seeing a shift in workforce needs. Several sectors of the state's economy are shrinking, according to Leslie Boney, director of the Institute for Emerging Issues at N.C. State University. In 2018, the institute published a report that predicted by 2040, about 25% of today's jobs will no longer exist, and roughly 20% of the wages will no

longer go for their original purpose.

"This doesn't mean we will have 25% unemployment in 20 years. It means 25% of the people are going to be [doing] something different than they are doing now," Boney says.

Of course, technology can contribute to this as new advances offer functions that can replace some human roles. However, an innovative, collaborative robotics program at Wake Technical Community College aims to keep humans in their industry, while using robots to increase productivity.

The program, launched at Wake Tech's Advanced Manufacturing Center in Raleigh, features YuMi, an award-winning, dual-arm robot manufactured by ABB, a global leader in automation robotics. The Zurich, Switzerland-based company donated YuMi to Wake Tech through a partnership with the Wake Tech Foundation. The National Science Foundation provided a \$575,277 grant to fund the robotics program, which is among the first of its kind in the United States. YuMi joins two single-arm robots, and all three are programmed to perform different functions.

"Collaborative robots don't replace humans. They work alongside humans, doing routine, assembly-line functions and giving their human co-workers opportunities to perform higher-level tasks, such as programming and running the robots," says Michael Moore, director of manufacturing and apprenticeship training at Wake Tech.

Boney predicts robotics are just one industry that will rise to the top in the future. Another big growth area will be trade occupations, which are often neglected in workforce development conversations.

"Skilled trade jobs like plumbers, electricians and carpenters are going to be very important in the future, and that's true in both rural and urban areas," he says.

For these kinds of jobs, apprenticeships are key. Wake Tech offers apprenticeships in health care, auto technology, information technology and hospitality, according to Pamela Howze, who over-

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sees apprenticeships and customized training at Wake Tech.

"Studies show apprentices earn \$300,000 more over the course of their careers than those with no apprenticeships," she says. "It's a learn-to-earn model. Apprentices work for a good salary while taking related instruction at the same time. Most are hired immediately after completing their apprenticeships."

Beaufort County Community Col-

lege has partnered with three Beaufort County manufacturing companies to create an apprenticeship program for certified journeymen, welders, electrical linemen, and production processing and maintenance, according to Watson. The program also offers pre-apprenticeships for high school juniors and seniors who can go into a full apprenticeship after graduating and have their community college tuition waived at the same time.

"They work and get paid for 40 hours a week, plus get a free education on nights and weekends," Watson says.

A life of learning

There are many jobs going unfilled because people don't have the specialized skills to work in those niches, says Christina Harris, a recruiter for Regional Advanced Manufacturing Pipeline East — also known as RAMP East — a 10-county partnership that addresses the workforce needs for the advanced-manufacturing industries.

RAMP East helps people prepare for those careers through coursework and job-placement assistance. According to Harris, the unemployment rate in the RAMP East region is about 5%.

"Our challenge is to help people who are underemployed," she says. "We are looking at the minimum-wage earners, helping them find jobs that pay higher wages and, if they skill up, they may have opportunities to get better jobs."

The Golden LEAF Foundation shares those goals. "We are here to promote economic development in the formerly tobacco-dependent, distressed areas of the state," says Ted Lord, a senior vice president.

Since its inception in 1999, Golden LEAF has helped create 63,053 jobs that have added \$624 million in payroll. Its investments also helped train or retrain more than 68,000 workers. The foundation has awarded 1,557 grants worth more than \$802 million.

Last summer, Golden LEAF awarded three grants totaling more than \$2.5 million to Beaufort County Schools for career education; the Mid-East Commission in Washington, N.C., to help build an advanced-manufacturing workforce; and East Carolina University to place interns in rural communities.

Beaufort County Schools will use its \$1.2 million grant to help prepare kids for career opportunities.

"We are going to concentrate on upgrading our health-sciences programs and our agriculture programs, which already exist in all three of our high schools," says Wendy Petteway, Beau-

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fort County Schools' career and technical education director. The program will also fund training in welding, automotive servicing, electrical trades and boat building.

While many programs are in place for young students, existing workers won't be left out, according to Margaret Robertson, associate vice president for workforce development and continuing education with the N.C. Community College System.

"Modern learning and skill development don't stop with a diploma or a certificate," she says. "The 20th-century workforce is expected to learn skills, get a job and progress in the same workplace until retirement. But today's careers are all about learning skills, growing with those skills, becoming adaptable and flexible."

She predicts that during the course of a single career, workers will have to continue learning new skills, because the job they get right after graduating from school is not the job they are going to be doing 20, 30 or 40 years later.



The Computer Integrated Machining degree at Guilford Technical Community College prepares students to work with technology to take a production idea from design to development and final production.

She applauds the Beaufort County coalition for its foresight, adding that it's a labor of love for local economic and workforce developers.

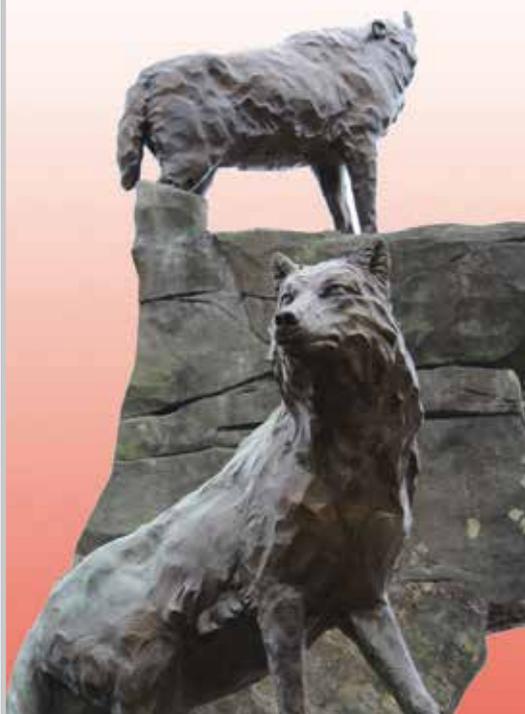
"In a small community like ours, you fall in love with the people you work with, and you want them to have jobs here, and so our work is not just what we get paid for. These are my people, my neighbors, my fellow

churchgoers," Watson says. "We all love Beaufort County. We all want to see it grow and [see] the companies here stay healthy and have healthy employees. We're not in it for the money or the fame. We just want our community to thrive." ■

— Teri Saylor is a freelance writer based in Raleigh.

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