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Manufacturers say jobs growing in area

By [Marc Katz](#), Staff Writer

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It turns out, even in what appears to be a community with limited job opportunities, good jobs can be had in the Miami Valley with the right training.

They're available in an area that might not be so obvious: manufacturing.

There are so many jobs available, in fact, some companies are having a difficult time filling them.

We need experienced free agents right now," said Michael Snell, general manager of Silfex, a semiconductor company in Eaton. Every year it's like you're going in the Super Bowl. You need the talent right now. You don't have the time to go through the draft.

We're trying to make (students) proceed on a skills path that will make them valuable when they graduate." They are so valuable, Harold Niehaus, a teacher and director of instructional development at the Miami Valley Career Technology Center (MVCTC) in Englewood, says every one of his manufacturing tract graduates has as many as four offers upon completing a two-year course.

I've got a headline for your story," said Niehaus. It's "Hidden job opportunities in Dayton." "

While Angela Erbaugh of the Dayton Tooling and Manufacturing Association had no hard data, she said, That's what I'm hearing. Everybody's looking for workers."

Good jobs, good earnings, good benefits'

Niehaus said training for jobs in areas such as precision machining have openings because, everything you read in the newspaper is 'so-and-so manufacturing just left town.' That's all you see on the news.

We've already seen as the economy start to come back a little bit, the manufacturing jobs are coming back. Good jobs, good earnings, good benefits."

According to the DTMA, there are about 2,400 manufacturing jobs in the Dayton area. From 2006-09, the manufacturing industry invested \$2.5 billion in the area, creating 10,060 jobs."

In a survey compiled last year by the National Association of Manufacturers, those jobs paid in a range from \$12 and \$40 per hour based on skills and experience.

Skills include knowing more math than a high school graduate, but maybe not much more than a two-year degree from Sinclair Community College would provide.

Silfex has even hired employees for jobs requiring Ph.Ds.

We've got an enormous range (of jobs)," Snell said. We haven't hired many high school level graduates. We have to figure out how to get them updated machinery. There are just not enough students choosing machining as programs. How can we encourage people to follow that path?"

At MVCTC, there is an effort being made, even for adults already in the work force who want to improve their job status.

More technical skills needed

Young kids don't understand this is a viable, clean, kind of exciting skilled opportunity," said Amy Leedy, MVCTC's supervisor of adult education. You just don't have parents saying, 'Oh, yeah, go into that.' They

MVCTC's supervisor of adult education. You just don't have parents saying, 'Oh, yeah, go into that.' They want to find something that has sustainability to it, and manufacturing doesn't have that yet. It's not what kids think of when they hear precision machining.

The Delphi plants are all closed, by the way."

At MVCTC, Niehaus says he has between 30 and 40 juniors and seniors enrolled in precision machining, with another estimated 40 in robotics and automation.

Every one of those kids has three to four job offers," Niehaus said. That means three jobs don't get picked. And that's only 70-80 kids out of 1,800 who are here."

Silfex is an offshoot of Bullen Manufacturing, which sold the bulk of its business to Lam Research Corp. of Fremont, Calif., for \$175 million in 2006. Bullen continues to operate in a variety of electronic fields. It was started by James A. Bullen and specialized in ultrasonic machining technologies. Bullen's daughter now runs the company.

Our processes aren't push-button and walk away," said JoAnn Beineke, general manager of Bullen, which essentially started the semiconductor business in the Eaton area.

Our processes requires the operator to make some decisions. It's more common sense and (the operator has to) be a little more mechanically minded. We find people don't consider manufacturing, they don't know it's out there and it's a living wage job."

Always looking for workers

A year ago, Bullen went through a hiring wave and expects to go through another in the near future if expansion plans materialize.

While Bullen was able to retain its name and continue to produce work in Eaton, Silfex has grown to become the largest manufacturer of its kind in the United States. It is a major exporter of silicon components used in memory elements of cell phones, smartphones and computer drives.

Snell says his company is always looking for workers.

The pace of change is phenomenal and, it's accelerating," Snell said. The amount of capital we have to invest every year is huge. We spend more than \$10 million a year here.

Everything we do has to get more precise. We also need a much higher skill level in people we hire.

We've gone from the kind of people who had some tool and die experience to needing those with a higher understanding of math. They have to understand safety."

He said their employees need to understand how to program machines and how technology changes over time.

We have more than 270 workers here," he added. We could ship more if we could get machines faster and get qualified people quicker."

Snell said Silfex is engaged with the region's school systems. We go to high schools," he said.

We need to find a way to advertise what there is. We have to show a way that it is a good vocational path. Everybody's under cost pressure. People think of the GM plants. There aren't jobs anymore for \$40-an-hour fork lift operators. And will never be."

For Snell and other manufacturers, he said the traditional blue-collar factory and assembly-line jobs are gone. He said companies are looking for qualified machinists. The market rate for machinist is the mid-\$20s per hour plus benefits. It's not the manufacturing jobs of the past. It's also in a safer and cleaner environment.

And we can't afford turnover. If you get somebody that's good, you have to keep them."

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