

CWI MEETS SKILLED LABOR DEMAND



Employers struggle to fill machine tech jobs

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Riley Johnson is still in his first year of the machine tool technology program at the College of Western Idaho, but he is already working in the field and getting paid to do so.

Johnson has a paid internship at a local business where he can use what he learns in the classroom at CWI's Micron Center for Professional Technical Education in Nampa. At the same time, he completes projects at his job that provide new learning opportunities.

"There's so much to learn, and I can bring that to class and share it with the other students," he said.

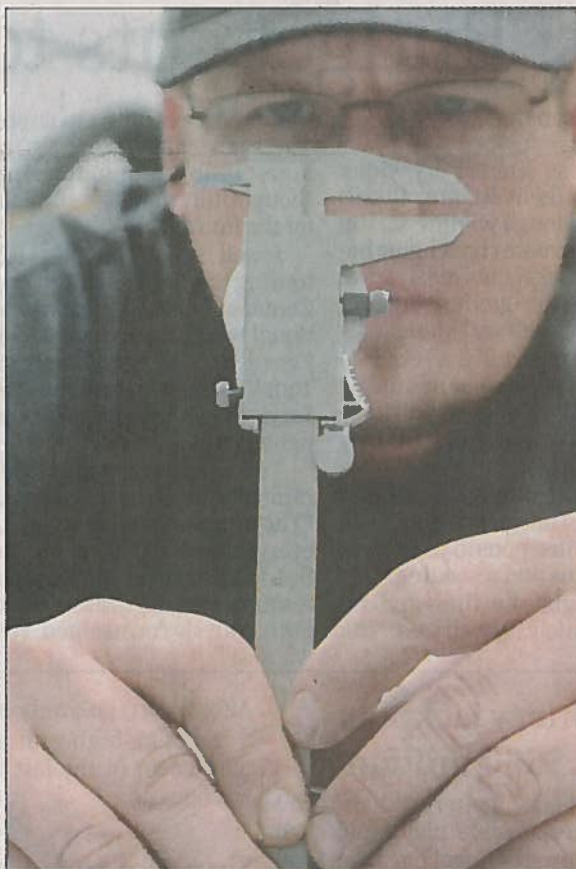
Johnson will continue at his job over the summer and then work and go to school again in the fall. When he finishes the program, Johnson doesn't think it will be difficult to find a permanent job in his field.

"It's pretty steady, and jobs are open all the time," he said.

“**When you expand your work force by any measurable amount, maintenance technicians have to match your work force because they keep everything running.**”

JOSE DELEON

Senior work force consultant in business services at the Idaho Department of Labor



Above: College of Western Idaho student Ethan Hickman uses a J-head Mill to refinish an anvil at the college's Micron Center for Professional Technical Education Thursday. **Below:** CWI's Chris Gehrman inspects his work on a small vise assembly Thursday. The need for machinists in Idaho's workforce is expected to rise 24.2 percent from 2010 to 2020.

Photos by Aaric Bryan/IPT

CWI

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According to a 2012 survey by ManpowerGroup, skilled trades, machinists and machine operators were among the 10 hardest to fill positions in the U.S. and have been for the past few years. More than half of employers surveyed cited a lack of available talent and no applicants as the reason for having difficulty filling jobs. Fifty-four percent said applicants were looking for more pay than was offered and 44 percent cited lack of experience as the reason positions weren't filled.

Dave Sperry, program chair of CWI's machine tool technology program, said he gets calls about every other week from employers looking at CWI students to fill jobs. The program is small — less than 20 stu-

dents — and not all of them stick with it. But jobs are waiting for those who do. All seven of Sperry's spring graduates this year are employed, he said.

For graduating student Mark Carrington, the program provided an opportunity to start a second career in a field he enjoys.

"There's a lot of satisfaction in truly making something from scratch," he said.

WHAT EMPLOYERS ARE LOOKING FOR

The equipment students use in the machine tool program is designed to be the same manual and CNC equipment they will encounter on the job, Sperry said. The program's Technical Advisory Committee, which includes local companies, helps to ensure the curriculum is up to date and students are taught necessary skills. That, coupled with on-the-job training, all creates an attractive final product when students graduate, Sperry said.

"Our students are more than capable of satisfying entry-level needs," he said.

Students in CWI's welding program don't just learn how to weld, they also learn how to be good employees, with an emphasis on safety, attendance and hard work, program chair Randy Johnson said. The program tries to create an atmosphere as close as possible to what students will find on the job, from the equipment to the uniforms to nicknames for the students, he said.

Johnson said there is no shortage of work for welders, and CWI recently added an additional 32 students and a full-time instructor to the program that has had about 16 students per year. But it's the students who work hard in the program who succeed and find jobs, Johnson said.

That includes first-year student J.R. Rodriguez, who was able to get a welding job while still in the program.

"It's a good, rounded program. You learn dif-



Aaric Bryan/IPT

College of Western Idaho's Orrin Brown calibrates a mill at the Micron Center in Nampa on Thursday.

IDAHO'S PROJECTED GROWTH IN WELDERS, MACHINISTS

Welders, cutters, solderers and blazers

Employment in 2010: 1,981

Projected employment in 2020: 2,451

Percent change: 23.7 percent

Annual openings: 100

Median hourly wage: \$15.32

Machinists

Employment in 2010: 1,242

Projected employment in 2020: 1,542

Percent change: 24.2 percent

Annual openings: 53

Median hourly wage: \$17.95

Source: Idaho Department of Labor Long-Term Occupations Projections

RETIRING WORKERS

Twenty years ago, older workers made up about 9 percent of the state's skilled trade labor force, according to the Idaho Department of Labor. Today, workers that are age 55 and over make up about 12 percent of the labor force in manufacturing, utilities, repair services, transportation and warehousing industries.

When those workers retired 20 years ago, 530 jobs needed to be replaced each year. That number has now grown to 960 workers per year who need to be replaced, the Department of Labor reported.

ferent aspects of the business," Rodriguez said.

HARD TO FILL

LOCAL POSITIONS

Jose DeLeon, senior work force consultant in business services at the Idaho Department of Labor, said local companies struggle to fill certain jobs in food processing, food manufacturing and general manufacturing. Those jobs include maintenance technicians, program-mable logic controllers and instrumentation techs. Employers are looking for

people with experience in the industry that can be trained in house.

The dairy industry, for example, is looking for maintenance technicians to meet its expanding needs.

"When you expand your work force by any measurable amount, maintenance technicians have to match your work force because they keep everything running," DeLeon said.

The industries use networking to find individuals who have needed skill sets and grow some workers internally, he said.