



GO Virginia Region One
Advanced Manufacturing Working Team

January 31, 2019

11:30 AM - 1:00 PM

Virginia Highlands Small Business Incubator
851 French Moore Jr., Blvd., Abingdon, VA

Meeting Notes:

In attendance:

Maggie Anderson, Speyside Bourbon Cooperage
Becki Joyce, The University of Virginia's College at Wise
Karen Sorber, Micronic Technologies
James Craver, Tadano Mantis
Nelson Teed, Manufacturing Technology Center
Melinda Leland, United Way of Southwest Virginia
Tommy Clements, Mountain Empire Community College
Susan Copeland, Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority
Robyn Lee, The University of Virginia's College at Wise
Te-Kai Shu, Strongwell
Tim Lawson, General Engineering Co.
Andrew Barnes, The University of Virginia's College at Wise
Cindy Fleming, Core Health and Fitness
Lennie Gail Mitcham, The Southwest Virginia Alliance for Manufacturing
Mandy Barker, The Southwest Virginia Alliance for Manufacturing

Effective Supervisor Training Presentation

After a welcome and introductions, Courtney Stringer from UVa-Wise gave a short presentation about the Effective Supervisor Training in Abingdon. The training will be 5 sessions from 9:00am - 4:00pm, every other week. Work will be done both as individuals and in groups. Five modules will be covered with a graduation at the end. The cost for the program is \$1,250 per person with a discount for five or more employees. Becki Joyce gave a testimonial to the

strength of the program.

Current Initiatives

Robyn Lee discussed the current GO Virginia Region One initiatives. The first she discussed is the Southwest Virginia Hublink project. It is an enhanced capacity planning project to build an online jobs platform to connect IT talent to occupations. It received \$27,000 in funding with plans to apply for an implementation grant.

The second initiative is from Virginia Tech with the City of Norton and Wise County. They are working with EnviraCarbon in Wise to do a market study of turning coal into graphene. There is also hope this will turn into an implementation grant.

Another initiative is the smart farming program from Mountain Empire. The grant will be used to study vegetation surveys made with drones. The drone can determine deficiencies and the plan is to have the drones deliver treatment. This grant was \$310,000.

Melinda Leland spoke about the United Way Ignite initiative. The United Way used grant money to expand the Ignite Program from middle into high school. They are helping schools with a credential study including soft skills, and current interaction between high schools and business. They are also creating a Speakers Bureau Repository by collecting a group of community college and business people who will go in and speak and engage teachers in project based learning. Another project is Major Clarity which will show students career opportunities and allow for career exploration. The United Way has Ignite coordinators in every middle and high school. Through this program they are hoping for 40 internships.

Lennie Gail Mitcham discussed statewide manufacturing projects from other regions and pointed out that many of the Region One ideas that have been discussed have been approved in other regions, at least in part. Mentioned projects included “Stopping the Brain Drain” and “Talent Collaborative” projects in Region 2, “Greater Opportunities in Technology and Engineering Careers (GO-TEC)” in Region 3, and the “Welding Training Program” in Region 6.

Manufacturing Listening Session

Next the manufacturers were asked to address their greatest needs. Maggie Anderson with Speyside Bourbon Cooperage explained that everyone who comes into their facility gets trained. Their biggest challenge is employees getting past the drug test, and a lack of soft skills. Speyside likes the idea of hiring young and moving up through the company. They also have recruiting and attendance challenges.

Karen Sorber with Micronic Technologies stated their technology is very unique from an engineering stand point. Their biggest need is engineering talent. She has the idea of using graduate students in an “engineer in residence” program, funded by a grant. The program could allow engineering talent to be shared. Tim Lawson discussed how Universal Fibers engages

engineering students from Virginia Tech to work in the company as their senior project. This program is used to both solve problems and recruit talent.

Cindy Fleming with Core Health and Fitness informed the group her company has 93 employees and 125,000 manufacturing square feet. She is interested in a collaborative way to work with other manufacturers who have capacity needs, utilizing the resources available through the company - creating a service company. She stated that her company will be in full production through June, but after that will sublease space and equipment.

James Craver with Tadano Mantis stated his company's greatest need is welders and machinists. They are having an issue finding qualified welders. Most welders receive training towards their certification test, but not beyond that and therefore don't have the necessary job skills to start working. They are also lacking knowledge of weld symbols and blueprint reading. He also mentioned the need to attract talent by promoting the area and making southwest Virginia more attractive for potential candidates. He feels it is necessary to continue to address the need for "blue collar" workers and improve the perception of those jobs.

Lennie Gail Mitcham read an email from Larry House with Volvo where he stated their greatest need is with specific talent and candidates with an operational understanding.

Te-Kai Shu from Strongwell noted their biggest challenge is being "ghosted," having people not show back up for work without any notice. Some of the things Strongwell is doing to address workforce needs is offering paid internships, investing money into school robotics, starting "Strongwell University" to train within the facility, and are hiring different ability employees.

Tim Lawson with General Engineering believes workforce development needs to start at the middle school level. Students should be taught how to get and hold down a job long term. General Engineering needs people who can pass a drug test and who have necessary soft skills. He also needs qualified machinists. He stated that General Engineering is bringing in interns.

Next Working Team Meeting

Due to a desire to not lose momentum from the conversations of this meeting, the next meeting was been moved up from the previously scheduled meeting in April, to March 7th from 11:30-1:00 at the Virginia Highlands Small Business Incubator. Everyone is encouraged to bring their own lunch.