

G.S. Precision, VTech open school

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BRATTLEBORO -- For years now G.S. Precision has had trouble filling key manufacturing jobs as the company has grown and expanded.

The company, which manufactures precision parts for aircraft engines, medical instruments and other technologies has reached out to area schools and colleges looking for employees but it has been a challenge finding trained machinists and engineers.

Now the company is partnering with Vermont Technical College to help its own employees to get the training they need to further their careers.

One of Brattleboro's largest employers, G.S. Precision on Tuesday opened its new school of manufacturing just down the road from its main building in the Exit One Industrial Park.

The company worked with VTech to create a program which employees will take at the company's building with VTech instructors for two years.

The credit can be used toward an eventual associate's degree or bachelor's degree in engineering, or the employee can use the knowledge and skills to advance within the company.

"Today is a special day for our company as we embark on a new unique venture with our friends from VTech," said G.S. Precision President and CEO Norm Schneeberger while announcing the opening of the G.S. Precision School of Manufacturing Technology. "Going back to the beginning of this company, training and education have been key elements to our proven success."

Vermont Technical College has worked with other companies around the state to develop curriculum built around the specific needs of the local industry.

Under the model, the company invests in classrooms and training facilities while VTech staff develop the lessons and lead the classes.

VTech is also able to provide some grant money to help the students pay for the classes.

"Most of training that we used to do is hands on and it's really important to have that practical experience," Schneeberger said. "But what we hope to accomplish with this endeavor is to provide the opportunity for our students to have that hands-on training with a top notch classroom education. VTC will take care of that end of it, and we'll take care of the hands-on work."

During the first year, 11 G.S. Precision employees are enrolled in the two-year program.

After the program the student can stay at G.S. Precision or move on to another company.

Maureen Hebert, director of the Continuing Education & Workforce Development Division of Vermont Technical College, said the program at G.S. Precision was built specifically around the needs of the company using the machines on hand with VTech's teachers.

"If we are able to bring this instruction to the company it makes it easier for the student who doesn't have to travel," said Hebert. "Their growth here has been phenomenal and they are having a hard time finding employees, so this is a way to grow their own and train their own employees."

According to Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation Director of Workforce Development, Patricia Moulton Powden, the new manufacturing school at G.S. Precision strengthens the long-term commitment of the company to the region.

At a time when salaries and growth are stagnant and some companies are worrying about the future, Moulton Powden said the new school will help the company, its employees and the region to better prepare for the future.

"It is not so often that you see a company make this type of investment in their own classrooms and lab space," she said. "It's a huge statement by the leadership of G.S. Precision to say 'Yes, we want to train talent and we want to form a relationship and we are willing to put our money where our mouth is.' It's a major investment by the company in workforce development and recruitment here in Windham County."