



## **“Workforce Development During and After the Pandemic”**

**Presentation to the House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development**

**April 9, 2021**

**William Lucci, Assistant Director for Adult Technical Education**

**Stafford Technical Center**

### **In the Beginning**

On March 19, 2020 classes met for what was to be the last time for three weeks which proved to be wishful thinking.

Schedules for all of our adult classes were recalibrated with the expectation that they would resume and finish later than the original dates. This too turned out to be wishful thinking.

Fortunately, the Electrical-Plumbing Apprenticeship Program that we host through Vermont Technical College had just completed its September-March cycle, and the 90+ students had little disruption in their education and training lives.

Several onsite VTC apprenticeship classes for GE were halted as the VSC struggled with transitioning to remote learning platforms to close out the Spring semester. This affected about 40 working STC students.

Students enrolled in STC-based classes were in various states of completion. Because these classes in welding, CDL, allied health, advanced manufacturing are pay-for-service skills-based training, the 100+ students were given the option to receive a pro-rated refund, be put “on hold” to resume training when schools were allowed to reopen face-to-face, or given a voucher to restart the class in the fall when the COVID issue was settled. Several classes that were scheduled to meet in May and June were cancelled due to the uncertainty of the situation.

## **Pivoting in the Middle**

During the late spring and early summer, planning began for deploying our fall classes. However, we were left with challenges in delivering a third-party certification examination for a dozen of our Medical Assistant students. Like all of us in and outside education, the national organization (National Healthcareer Association) that deploys the test had no plan for offering the examination outside of its normal face-to-face proctored format. Students in this program were advised to continue to study the online materials and take the practice tests that were made available to them through STC and wait to hear from STC about when and where the examination could be proctored. Later (in late June) that question was answered when the school district agreed to allow two students at a time (following COVID guidelines) into Stafford to take their CCMA certification examination. Over the course of six three-hour sessions, every student passed the examination.

For our partners at GE, there were two summer classes scheduled to meet in July and August for two dozen Toolmaker Apprentices. With STC closed to face-to-face classes, we worked with GE leadership to use a large training room at its Columbian Avenue plant to deliver these two important classes so that these apprentices would stay on track for graduation at VTC next year.

Our partners at The Pines in Rutland, a large long-term care facility where our licensed nurse assistants perform their clinical hours during the course of our LNA program found itself in a bind. Finding LNAs is always difficult for long term care facilities, but the situation was becoming even more dire due to COVID-19. Again, because classes could not meet face-to-face in public schools, there would be no summer LNA class at Stafford. However, working with Tim Urich at the Pines, our own school officials, and the Board of Nursing, Tim was able to convert a dining facility into a classroom for us and we delivered our accelerated summer program “live” (following COVID guidelines) at the Pines to six incumbent workers who were operating on provisional emergency licenses as LNAs. All six nurse assistants finished the program and earned their licenses from the VBON before their provisional licenses expired.

Despite the fact that our CDL program was “closed” to face-to-face classroom and behind-the-wheel training from March-late June, we continued to meet virtually and in person with the leadership team at Casella Waste Systems to negotiate contract details in moving our CDL classroom and training yard from North Clarendon to West Rutland. During that time all of the pieces fell into place for developing a hybrid CDL training program for CWS, moving our classroom and trucks to the CWS Operations Center, renovating the classroom, and getting all of these changes approved by the Vermont DMV virtually in time to resume classes and behind-the-wheel training in mid-July following COVID guidelines. I’m sure you saw the ribbon cutting ceremony in November celebrating this “merger.”

And finally, following COVID guidelines established in Montpelier, we delivered a two-day advanced welding seminar in August to ten AOT and municipal employees in our welding school facility here at Stafford. These employees were provided the training they needed to deliver high-quality services to their state and regional garages need to maintain plows and trucks for what magically appeared on our roads last night. These same seminars have been delivered multiple times over the summer here at Stafford over the past five years through a contract STC has with the Vermont AOT. Leadership at the

state and municipal levels were grateful for the training they were provided especially during the pandemic.

### **The End Is Near**

We have been open full-throttle for both the Fall, 2020 and Spring, 2021 semesters. Our enrollment, though limited somewhat by the COVID guidelines, is at an all-time high. Two VTC-based apprenticeship classes for GE are meeting here in the evening. We have full enrollment in our LNA class, we have two cohorts of our certified Medical Assistant classes running with a combined enrollment of 20, our phlebotomy classes have been full, our welding program that provides training for adults through a four-course sequenced curriculum is at capacity, and we currently have a waiting list for our CDL-A and CDL-B program with an unprecedented number of women seeking their licenses to become professional truck drivers. All students entering our building continue to be COVID-screened which means taking temporal temperatures at the door, COVID questions being asked, and contact tracing guidelines being followed. Thus far we have had no reported cases.

What we have heard every night since we resumed classes is that adult students were thrilled to be back in our building for face-to-face training. Clearly this is the preferred mode of training for adults looking for a skill-based career. Many have said that they are looking at truck driving and Allied Health careers as “COVID-proof” occupations for the future. But whatever the reasons are for this unexpected bump in enrollment even while enrollment and classroom occupancy limitations caused by the pandemic are still upon us, we are grateful to have had the support of our stakeholders, our school officials here in Rutland, and especially our students who remain eager to return to our facilities to get the education and training they need to pursue employment in high-pay, high-demand careers in our region and in our state.

### **Post-Pandemic**

And moving forward post-pandemic, our default setting will continue to be to provide onsite and off-site education and training opportunities for our many stakeholders in our region. I would encourage you to take a look at the PowerPoint presentation that has been uploaded and posted on the House Committee’s webpage. *Career Training During A Pandemic and Beyond* highlights some of the customized and traditional programs we have delivered in the recent past to partners who see Stafford Technical Center as a familiar community-based provider of quality training programs for both incumbent and prospective employees.