

# Accredited training program prepares tomorrow's work force

*RCAM a collaboration of industry, education, government*

Following World War II, the “baby boomers” spurred America’s economic growth for more than five decades. During the next 25 years, 76 million baby boomers will retire and take with them an immense knowledge base, creating a skilled work force shortage nationwide.

In an effort to educate and train a new generation of skilled professionals to follow in the footsteps of the baby boomer generation, the Regional Center of Advanced Manufacturing (RCAM) has brought together government, industry and education to do the job.

Charlie Floyd, vice president and mill manager at Domtar Paper Co. in Kingsport, Tenn., said Domtar became involved with RCAM in 2003 during the company’s completion of a \$500-million modernization project.

“We knew the mill needed to invest in the formation of a pipeline for highly skilled manufacturing employees because our average employee age was 55 years old and skill levels were challenged with the new technology brought on by the project,” Floyd said. “Domtar began actively pursuing a partnership with government officials, the local technical college and other manufacturers to develop a partnership to create this pipeline.”

Because Domtar’s average worker was within a few years of retirement, Floyd said the company decided to take action and participate in the training of its future work force.

“Ultimately, Domtar donated the property, participated in the design and layout of the facility and partnered with others to develop the assessment process and the curriculum to meet Domtar’s needs,” Floyd said. “Domtar also provided senior level human resources, maintenance and engineering resources to teams charged with making RCAM a reality.”

Parker Smith, vice president and general manager, Worldwide Manufacturing Support & Quality (Tennessee and Texas operations) for Eastman Chemical Co., said Eastman worked together with Domtar, government entities and others to assist in developing the construction and curriculum for RCAM.

“In 2007, Eastman announced ‘Project Reinvest,’ a five-year, \$1.3-billion capital reinvestment plan in Tennessee site operations,” Smith said. “In addition to the numerous asset upgrades and expansions, it also included partnering with the Tennessee Economic and Community Development Department, the City of Kingsport, Sullivan County, Domtar Paper Co. and North East State Technical Community College in development of the Advanced Manufacturing Partnership (AMP) and construction of the RCAM.”

Smith said, Eastman, like many manufacturing companies, has a demographic bubble

made up of baby boomers near retirement. With almost 25 percent of operation employees retirement eligible, Eastman recognized the need to invest in its future work force and credited RCAM for providing his company with skilled and highly trained employees.

“RCAM provides state-of-the-art instructional and hands-on training to our employees and that is a must in order to safely run the complex manufacturing processes each company in the industry has,” Smith said. “RCAM is also a tremendous economic development tool for the region as they strive to retain existing companies and attract new ones. RCAM is providing the highly trained and skilled employees that are critical to Eastman’s current and future success as a global manufacturing company.”

Jeff Frazier, director of training and development of RCAM, said the center has programs to support training for electrical, mechanical, process operations and instrumentation disciplines, and offers both degree and nondegree formats to meet the needs of education and industry.

“Our logo says we are ‘Powered by the Advanced Manufacturing Partnership.’ This statement speaks volumes toward the synergy we’ve found when industry education and government work together to create solutions for work force development,” Frazier said. “We are proactively addressing the needs of the 21st century work force to remain competitive and drive innovation. Often you find education seeking to understand the needs of industry and then developing programs to meet those needs. With the AMP and RCAM, you find industry providing the leadership to define the need and then working jointly with education and government to development solutions.”

Floyd, Smith and Frazier said they all agree RCAM is a collaboration of various entities working together to support tomorrow’s work force and they are proud to be a part of that effort.

**For more information, visit [www.manufacturingfuture.net](http://www.manufacturingfuture.net) or call (423) 354-5149.** ●



The Regional Center of Advanced Manufacturing (RCAM) is located in Kingsport, Tenn., and is the advanced manufacturing outreach of Northeast State Community College.



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