

Valencia Training Center



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Valencia training center to spur careers in advanced manufacturing

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Osceola County already has seen one transition in its consumer power base from agriculture to tourism. The next seismic shift could be to becoming a manufacturing base.

The proposed Florida Advanced Manufacturing Research Center under construction just east of Kissimmee will lead much of the new push in the technology-manufacturing field. But many other Central Florida firms have products to be built, and they need skilled workers to make their visions happen as well.

Valencia College's Advanced Manufacturing Education and Training Center, slated to open in the fall, will work to provide entry points for currently unemployed workers, or those who want to begin a career in advanced manufacturing, by offering industry certification programs, school officials said.

Valencia already is hard at work hammering out a lease agreement to open up shop in a building that gun manufacturer Colt was supposed to occupy near the Florida's Turnpike entrance on U.S. Highway 192. A lease deal between Colt and the county fell through, and Valencia hopes to have a finalized deal to pay the county about \$85,000 annually in rent in place by the end of May.

Since the county renovated the building for manufacturing operations, it was a perfect fit at the perfect time, said Joe Battista, Valencia College vice president of global, professional and continuing education.

"We've learned from our local partners that there's a need for skilled workforce, but there's nothing now to train students they can employ," he said. "We believe there is a need for advanced manufacturing."

A Valencia study heralding the new institute emphasized the critical gap in skilled employees needed now by local manufacturers, such as Lockheed Martin, Mitsubishi Hitachi Power Systems, Herson Manufacturing, Collins Manufacturing and Regal Marine. And those are just firms Valencia College has forged partnerships with.

"People are familiar with Lockheed Martin, a major local employer, and it has 500 manufacturing suppliers," Battista said. "They all have a need for a skilled workforce. Also, Lockheed could lose 40 percent of its skilled workforce in the next seven years due to retirements."

In the study, Richard Sweat, CEO of .decimal, said businesses like his, a medical device manufacturer of patient-specific devices, could buy all the equipment it needs, "but it takes skilled people to run these expensive machines, who I don't have and can't find."

Battista said the push for an advanced manufacturing-institute likely started four years ago — before there was any talk of the sensor manufacturing center — when Valencia was a partner in

securing a federal manufacturing grant. Thanks to recently securing its own \$2.5 million federal grant from the Department of Labor and Department of Education Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training Initiative, the institute is now a reality.

“We didn’t know where to build it, but when the possibility that Colt would not move in came up, Kathleen (Plinske, president of Valencia’s Osceola and Lake Nona campuses) contacted us and the county about using that space,” he said.

The federal grant will pay for the training center’s staff, which will develop the curriculum.

“But the biggest piece of this is the number of future employees it can produce,” Battista said. “People don’t realize how many manufacturing jobs are in Central Florida, and with the sensor research center moving in, it creates a basis for new jobs and then a need to fill those existing jobs. This is going to be a good thing for the county and community.”

Among the nationally recognized industry certifications that will be available include Computer Numerical Control, Quality Control and Inspection, Mechatronics (mechanics, electronics and automation involving computer interface), Welding Technology and Assembly (the use of tools and processes) and a short-term Advanced Manufacturing Specialist Certificate (AMSC).

The progression at the new Valencia institute will be to get prospective skilled workers the classroom training they need to pass the certifications they’re working toward, then get them the hands-on training they need to be hireable in the job market.

In the case of hypothetical Valencia students, they could earn their certifications at the new institute and possibly get a job while working on associates degrees, which could then lead to bachelor’s degrees through the school’s Direct Connect program with UCF.

Plinske said that new career pathway offered exclusively by Valencia excited her.

“The proximity to us here on (U.S. Highway) 192 is an added convenient bonus, but there isn’t a facility anywhere locally that offers hands-on manufacturing training,” she said. “I’m excited for access Osceola County residents will have to high-demand training that will lead to employment, and what this might mean to the community. It’s a real investment in the creation of jobs in high-demand fields that will be ongoing.”

The Valencia study said it will follow the past success of two similar programs: a certified job-training program for German companies at Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte, N.C., and another at Indian River State College in Fort Pierce that ties with local manufacturers in a business partnership.