

# Business

---



U.S. Rep. Kathleen C. Hochul speaks to business leaders about the need for skilled workers Tuesday during a round-table discussion at Erie Community College's Amherst campus.

## Area manufacturers say they need more skilled workers

### Business leaders discuss the need for trained employees

BY: [David Robinson \(mailto:d robinson@buffnews.com\)](mailto:d robinson@buffnews.com)

Updated: September 26, 2012, 07:29 AM Published: September 25, 2012, 01:39 PM

CNC Technical Solutions in Medina is looking for a few good, skilled manufacturing workers, but it hasn't had much luck.

"We've been advertising for months and months, and we have been having trouble finding people," said John Nappa, the company's chief executive officer.

Peter Coleman, the business development manager at Hebel Corp., sees the same thing at the Town of Tonawanda company, which has had trouble finding skilled manufacturing workers for its Military Road plant.

But it's a different story at its factory in Port Colborne, Ont., where its J. Oskam Steel Fabricators Ltd. business has grown by 40 percent over the last three years, partly because it is involved with youth and adult [apprenticeship programs](#) in Canada that have helped meet its workforce needs, Coleman said.

While manufacturing in the Buffalo Niagara region is just a shadow of what it was during its heyday a half-century ago, Coleman and other local business officials say there are many openings for factory work locally that are going unfilled - or are being filled by workers brought in from elsewhere - because local workers lack the skills that are needed to fill those positions.

"There is a serious gap between what our companies need and what our young people who are just getting out of college can offer them," said U.S. Rep. Kathleen C. Hochul, D-Hamburg, who held a roundtable discussion Tuesday at Erie Community College's Amherst campus to discuss the shortfall in worker training.

Hochul estimated that there are 600,000 [job openings](#) in advanced manufacturing across the country, including a significant, but not quantified, number here.

"We know there's a problem. We've identified it," she said. "We need a partnership where the companies say, we need students with X, Y and Z skills and we'll give them a job."

Part of the solution is to develop better coordination between the training programs offered at local high schools and at community colleges and local businesses, said Jack Quinn, ECC president.

After all, he said, the skills needed for today's high-tech manufacturing are different from the skills needed decades ago.

"It's a different kind of job now," he said. "It's a lot more technical."

Timothy Gominiak, a maintenance team manager at Perry's Ice Cream in Akron, said the work for today's maintenance technicians is becoming more complex. "There's a higher need for skills," he said. "Everything's being automated."

There are local programs aimed at getting students ready for jobs in a skilled trade. About 15 local high schools offer a specialized pre-engineering curriculum. The Board of Cooperative Educational Services offers programs in electrical systems and welding for high school students. About 2,400 students participate in those programs, said Melody Jason, the executive director of instructional programs and services for Erie 1 BOCES. ECC offers a wide range of programs for electrical, mechanical and other industrial technology.

Yet vocational training still has a negative stigma attached to it, Coleman said.

Part of it is because parents often don't believe there's much of a future in manufacturing, after seeing the region lose two of every five factory jobs since 1990. Local manufacturing employment, which was just under 93,000 in 1990, has plunged to just 53,400 today, though economists say many of the jobs that vanished were lower-skill positions that could be done cheaper overseas, leaving a core of more sophisticated jobs that demand greater skill - and often pay better wages.

"You have to get parents to steer people to these jobs," said Patrick Radtke, the president of United Auto Workers Local 897. "Everybody has that 'what it was 10 years ago' idea stuck in their mind about the auto industry. We should be talking about robot cell design."

High school guidance counselors also need to be aware that there still are opportunities to make a decent living through manufacturing. "There's still that apprehension about sending people into the trades," Jason said. "But if you have a trade in your back pocket, you'll never be without work."

email: drobinson@buffnews.com

ERROR: Object template ArticleByline is missing!

---