

Gold collar jobs

Pa. manufacturers can't find enough skilled workers to fill high-paying positions

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President Trump has pledged to bring back offshored manufacturing jobs through a strategy of tax cuts, tariffs, eased regulations and renegotiated trade agreements. The number of U.S. manufacturing jobs has declined by 7.23 million (37 percent) since manufacturing peaked in 1979, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. While much of America's heavy industry has moved offshore, the U.S. is still the world's largest manufacturer, with 21 percent of global manufactured goods being produced here. China is second largest with 15 percent, and Japan third with 12 percent.

Challenges that neither executive orders nor congressional legislation could easily remedy stand in the way of reshoring manufacturing jobs. First, unskilled or semi-skilled mass manufacturing jobs, which had employed millions of Americans, are not coming back because those jobs have been replaced by automation. Boston Consulting Group reported that it costs less than \$8 an hour to use a robot for spot welding in the auto industry versus \$25 an hour for a worker. Second, manufacturing jobs that never left or have already come back are skilled trades jobs such as welders, pipefitters and ironworkers, and those skilled workers are in short supply. In 2012, 53 percent of skilled trades workers in the



Photo courtesy of Riggs Industries

Riggs Industries & Subsidiaries in Somerset County is one of several Pennsylvania manufacturers left with job openings.

U.S. were 45 years and older and 18.6 percent were between the ages of 55 and 64.

Manufacturers in our region such as Riggs Industries, Rockwood Manufacturing, Corle Building Systems, Martin-Baker America and North American Höganäs have had job openings they couldn't fill because of a lack of qualified candidates despite that many skilled trades jobs start at \$40,000 per year and go up to \$80,000 a year.

"Opportunities in Pennsylvania to make a good living in the skilled trades is growing," said Shawn Kaufman, director of human resources for Riggs Industries

& Subsidiaries in Somerset County, a manufacturing and construction firm with 500 employees and over \$100 million in annual sales.

"The problem is we've been telling high school students since the 1970s that if you want to be successful and make a good living, you need a bachelor's degree.

"For every 10 job openings in the U.S., one will require a master's degree or higher, two will require a Four-year college degree, and seven will require either a technical certificate or a two-year associate's degree in a skilled trade.

"Despite the opportunities, for many

parents the idea their children going into one of the trades or attending a vocational or technical school is not even on their radar."

The Challenge Program, Inc. in Johnstown is trying to change that situation. The nonprofit's mission is to build sustainable business/education partnerships while introducing students and their parents to careers in their communities including skilled trade jobs. On March 16, Career Challenge will hold an outreach event at Somerset High School that will feature reps from Riggs Industries, Rockwood Manufacturing, Corle Building Systems and Martin-Baker, who will inform attendees about good paying trades jobs.

"The language being used to talk about these positions is 'gold collar jobs,' because they are highly skilled technical positions that require a wealth of training and knowledge, and they do offer high paying wages," said Sara Deyarmin, senior program development manager at the Challenge Program.

"Before I took this position with the Challenge Program and got a chance to meet representatives from a lot of these local manufacturers, I would have assumed that they employed people who worked at dirty, blue collar jobs that don't necessarily pay that well, but that's not the case.

"As we start to talk about these jobs in language that more accurately reflects the modern state of manufacturing and the skills required, I think that will help dispel the old stigma of skill trades students as the 'shop kids.'" ■

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from individuals, group conferences and social events.

"The third thing we built were [26] residential condominiums. The last time residential condominiums were delivered in downtown State College was when Mimi [Barash Coppersmith] built the towers on South Allen Street in 1985.

"So we felt that we were building three products that there was either high-demand or built-up demand for. And I think we were right on all three."

The mixed-use building also features a Federal Taphouse on the second floor, which is slated to open in May; four

top-floor penthouses and 5,000 square feet of meeting space designed for everything from business meetings and expos to wedding receptions.

Overall, the new center will prove to be a boon to the city's move towards walkability and, while the added downtown shopping benefits students, feels more geared towards the residents than the students of State College.

"The downtown improvement district and State College in general were very supportive of us building this building because, for the most part, if you are building a property downtown, you are building student housing. It's the highest and best use and it's worth the most. So by building retail and a hotel we didn't take the easier route. Not that building anything is easy," Brandeis said. ■



Photo courtesy of Spencer Myers

The bottom floor of the multi-use building features a Target and H&M with higher ceilings and more open design.