

Internal collaboration providing fast track to jobs

Their machining and tool and die skills had served them well for a decade or two, but, by the time seven workers found themselves laid off from longtime jobs, those same skills were in dire need of upgrading. That's when they contacted Macomb, and a new program was born.

"They were very skilled, top notch in their professions, but they were almost lost in transition," explained Gary Walters, skilled trades faculty, of the first class of students to complete the Computer Numerical Control (CNC) Fast Track program. "There is a real gap in the manufacturing sector between the traditional machinists and tool and die makers using manual machines and the technology now in use. Our goal was to transition them into entry- or mid-level positions in advanced manufacturing."

The idea for the program began to take shape last year when the college's Workforce Development Institute (WDI) began receiving calls from displaced machinists looking for retraining. Walters was contacted and began working with WDI to create an accelerated program for those with at least three to five years of experience in metal machining that would prepare them for immediate employment. The result was the six-week CNC Fast Track, sponsored by Michigan Works!, which accepted its first students in January.



Gary Walters, skilled trade faculty, shows a group of students how to operate a TL-1 CNC lathe in the college's HAAS Technical Education Center. The students are primarily laid-off machinists who enrolled in the new CNC Fast Track program, a collaboration with the college's Workforce Development Institute, to upgrade their skills and prepare for new jobs. From left to right: Dennis Lewis, Mike Nelson, Rob Schulte, Walters, Jeff Kummerl, Mansour Alkhaldi and Steve Mazure.

The pilot program was taught in the HAAS Technical Education Center in T Building, South Campus, with the first class completing it at the end of March. Five of the students have already been offered jobs. A second CNC fast track class began in May, with another expected to be launched in the fall.

"Guys my age are scared to go back to school," observed Mike Nelson, a mold maker for 30 years who had already earned close to 70 credits at Macomb when he returned to take the CNC Fast Track after being laid off this year. "I tell them it's just like swimming; once you get in the water, you remember how it's done." ◀