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Fox Valley Workforce Development Board Nabs \$300K in Grants; Benefits worker training in Clintonville, Oshkosh, Ripon and Waupaca *\$1 MILLION IN FAST FORWARD GRANTS AWARDED TO FOX VALLEY SINCE 2013*

The Fox Valley Workforce Development Board was named a recipient of two Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development Fast Forward Grants valued at more than \$300,000. The dollars will be used to train 60 workers in either manufacturing fundamentals or press brake operations, both critical employment needs in our area. The announcement was made by Lt. Governor Rebecca Kleefisch and DWD Secretary Ray Allen at a press conference on February 6, held at Jay Manufacturing in Oshkosh.

The Wisconsin Fast Forward worker training grant program is an innovative talent development solution driven by Wisconsin businesses to train and retain highly skilled workers. Grant awards incentivize Wisconsin employers to implement customized training programs that provide workers with the practical jobs skills they need to succeed in a 21st century workforce. The Fox Valley Workforce Development Board partnered with eight different companies on the two grants and named Fox Valley Technical College as their education provider for all training.

The first grant announced is the **Mechanical Fundamentals Grant**, a \$200,000 award to train 36 total employees to repair mechanical equipment in an industrial setting. Companies continue to find it difficult, if not impossible, to find experienced Mechanical Maintenance staff and projected demographic shifts due to baby boomer retirements will only increase the severity of this issue as a large number of skilled workers reach retirement age. Companies partnering in the Mechanical Fundamentals Grant are:

- Gusmer Enterprises and Waupaca Foundry in Waupaca
- Hoffmaster Creative in Oshkosh
- Creative Converting in Clintonville; and
- JM Smucker in Ripon.

The second grant announced is the Board's **Press Brake Grant**, a \$110,194 award to train 24 employees in the operation of a press brake. By using a press brake to form a part from a single piece of steel sheeting, rather than welding parts together, these manufacturers keep production costs competitive. As the Board addressed the need for this training, we learned that the current need for this skill set is so challenging that partner companies are not always able to run 100% of available equipment. This ultimately results in overtime for existing operators, which takes a toll on efficiency, increases the cost of goods produced, and increases operator stress levels. Additional trained operators allows a company to remain competitive.

Companies partnering in the Press Brake Grant are Jay Manufacturing, Muza Metal Products and SMC Metal Fabricators, all of Oshkosh.

A Fast Forward Grant is one in which the DWD matches financial commitments from partner employers. The program has tough metrics, requiring all employees to not only complete

the program and demonstrate proficiency, but the company must also provide each employee with a salary increase within a set period of time.

“A Fast Forward Grant is a not a giveaway, but a highly competitive and closely monitored investment in Wisconsin workers,” said Anthony Snyder, FVWDB CEO. “We see Fast Forward Grants as the catalyst to bring together coalitions of local employers to tackle their most urgent training needs.”

Since 2013, the Fox Valley Workforce Development Board has worked with local employers in its six county area of Calumet, Green Lake, Fond du Lac, Waupaca, Waushara and Winnebago, to bring in more than \$1 million in Fast Forward Grant dollars.

“Fast Forward Grants provide us with critical resources to drive significant economic development in our area,” said Snyder. “We’re always eager to bring those dollars home to ensure our employers remain vital.”

DWD’s Fast Forward grants are now awarded quarterly in a variety of business sectors. The next round of applications are due March 31, 2018. If you are interested in learning more, contact Bobbi Miller, FVWDB Business Services Manager, at bmiller@fvwdb.com.

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Fox Valley Workforce Development Board (FVWDB) is a not-for-profit working to build a world-class workforce in northeast Wisconsin. Serving six counties — Calumet, Green Lake, Fond du Lac, Waupaca, Waushara and Winnebago — FVWDB collaborates with a number of state and local agencies to help job seekers gain the skills needed to find employment, and to help businesses find the highly skilled workers they need.

FVWDB is an Equal Opportunity Employer and Service Provider.

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