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September 29. 2014 7:04AM

Three Rivers, QVCC each to get $1.2 million to boost job training

NORWICH - The region's two community colleges will share in a $15 million pool of federal aid to the state for their participation in the Connecticut Advanced Manufacturing Initiative, officials announced Monday.

"It's huge news locally, and we're so glad the college is a part of it," said Marjorie Valentin, associate dean of workforce and community education at Three Rivers Community College.

The Norwich institution is getting $1.28 million from the U.S. Department of Labor's Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training grant program that will be used to create an on-campus metals manufacturing course.

Quinebaug Valley Community College in Danielson is in line for $1.22 million and will focus its efforts on expanding its manufacturing machine technology Level I and Level II certificate programs.

"The Connecticut community college system has proven its ability to train students and get them employed at the conclusion of their Advanced Manufacturing Certificate. QVCC has a retention and employment rate of 85 percent after two years. We are presently collaborating with the technical high schools in our region, H.H. Ellis Technical and Windham Technical High School, by sharing facilities and teachers," Stephen LaPointe, director of Quinebaug's advanced manufacturing center, wrote in an email.

Combined, 12 community colleges and the online Charter Oak State College will benefit from the grant to carry out a four-pronged strategy: Expand facilities to support more students and new programs; increase retention and accelerate completion through student supports; enhance industry-driven training programs; and broaden access to registered apprenticeships.

"Both (Quinvebaug) and (Three Rivers) worked so hard on Connecticut's application and I'm relieved to see the proposal's significant block of funding that is slated to come to Eastern Connecticut to expand our manufacturing training capacity at a time when we need it most," said John Beauregard, executive director of the Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board.

Both of the region's community colleges are long-time partners with the Eastern Advanced Manufacturing Alliance, a consortium of manufacturing companies that promotes the industry's growth.

Nationwide, 270 community colleges are getting $470 million of the $2 billion initiativefrom the U.S. Labor Department.

The state's first advanced manufacturing center was launched at Asnuntuck Community College in Enfield. In 2011, new centers opened at Housatonic Community College in Bridgeport, Naugatuck Valley Community College in Waterbury and Quinebaug.

"The Connecticut Advanced Manufacturing Initiative represents the very best of what we can accomplish as a system by expanding our successful advanced manufacturing programs throughout our 12 community colleges," Gregory Gray, president of the Board of Regents for Higher Education, said in a statement.

Chris Jewell, chief financial officer and a partner at Collins & Jewell in Bozrah, said using colleges as a training ground for manufacturing training is a smart use of resources.

"There are people that started at EB (Electric Boat) 30 years ago that are retiring and have never been any place else," said Jewell, who is also chairman of the Eastern Advanced Manufacturing Alliance south chapter. "In order to train the staff we need as they start to retire, we need to do it at the community college level."

Valentin agreed.

"They're great career paths, because they are sustainable jobs with people building and making products," she said. "We can provide careers that let students support themselves and their families and move up within an organization."