

## Filling work force void Manufacturer East Tech creates alliances with schools

**By Brian Lazenby Staff Writer**

Online: Hear East Tech President Roger Layne discuss a new education initiative aimed at boosting the number of students seeking manufacturing careers.

An area design and manufacturing company is working with Chattanooga State and area schools in an attempt to steer students toward careers in manufacturing.

Roger Layne, president and founder of East Tech Co., said his efforts are an attempt to counter a lack of qualified candidates in the job pool for manufacturing jobs.

"The qualified people are not coming," Mr. Layne said. "I just feel like manufacturing is going to have to step up and go to these schools and tell them what we need."

East Tech provides engineering and design services and manufactures custom components for hydroelectric and nuclear power plants, as well as for the asphalt paving industry and the automobile industry.

There are several facets to the program including a \$1,000 scholarship that could be used for tuition at Chattanooga State Technical Community College or for tools that a potential employee might need to work in the manufacturing industry, he said.

East Tech also will give tours to students of its 767 River Terminal Road facility to show them the types of positions available, the kinds of equipment used in manufacturing and the possible salaries someone could earn, which Mr. Layne said could be more than \$60,000 a year.

Dr. Jim Catanzaro, president of Chattanooga State, said the school's machine tool technology program is an excellent place to learn the skills needed in manufacturing.

He compared the lack of qualified people interested in manufacturing careers to the nationwide nursing shortage.

"We just have to attract more people into these types of fields," he said. "Traditionally in our community they have been underenrolled."

Mr. Layne said he recently spent \$500,000 buying and installing some of the most high-tech equipment in the industry, which students are often not prepared or qualified to operate when they come out of school.

That's why Mr. Layne said he also wants to periodically allow teachers from area schools' manufacturing programs to visit his business so they will have a better understanding of some of the state-of-the-art equipment their students could be working with after graduation.

"The technology we have is so much greater than what is being taught in school," he said.

Mr. Layne said he hopes to help schools upgrade their training equipment as well as offer a four-year apprenticeship program.

Steve Holmes, principal of Sequoyah High School, said he met with Mr. Layne about the program and is interested in pursuing it for his students.

“It is something we definitely want to look at,” he said. “Anytime we can partner with someone like Mr. Layne or any of our business partners it is a great opportunity for our students.”

E-mail Brian Lazenby at

[blazenby@timesfreepress.com](mailto:blazenby@timesfreepress.com)



Staff Photo by Angela Lewis Brandon Shirley smooths link assembly parts at East Tech Co. on Friday. Mr. Shirley attended Chattanooga State Technical Community College's machine tool technology program 10 years ago.