



CMS student Lacey Hanson at North Georgia Tech's Toccoa Center.

Raising the Bar

The Certified Manufacturing Specialist program is becoming more popular across the state

At first it seems like a “Catch 22”: a manufacturing business is eager to open a new plant or expand an existing one, but needs employees with a certain set of basic skills. At the same time, hundreds of people are eager for good jobs, but lack the resources to learn the skills being sought by employers.

What’s a community to do?

The answer: the Certified Manufacturing Specialist (CMS) program that’s available through Georgia’s Technical College System.

Begun in 1996 at the suggestion of some business leaders in South Georgia, CMS has become an increasingly popular and effective way for manufacturing employers to prepare new employees and enhance the skills of existing ones. The program is periodically reviewed by an advisory board made up of business leaders from around the state to guarantee that the curriculum delivers what’s needed in today’s competitive global marketplace.

“As manufacturing becomes more sophisticated, the bar is steadily being raised on what are considered basic skills,” says Jackie Rohosky, DTAE assistant commissioner for Economic Development Programs. “By continually consulting with and getting input from the manufacturers themselves, we guarantee that the CMS curriculum is the best there is for teaching new and existing employees the skills they need to be effective in the 21st century manufacturing environment.”

“In order to strengthen the economy in the state, we need to focus on more of these opportunities to work with those businesses that need the support of a technically trained workforce.”

– Dr. Ruth Nichols
North Georgia Tech President

CMS

Certified Manufacturing Specialist™

CMS has also evolved into one of the easiest ways for individuals looking for careers in manufacturing to get the basic training they need to qualify for the available jobs. Grants available through the HOPE program make it possible for those with challenged means to go through the certification process, and at the end of the day what first seemed like an unsolvable “Catch 22,” becomes a successful, synergistic collaboration among businesses, the community and local technical colleges that contributes multiple returns to Georgia’s bottom line.

‘CMS Preferred Community’

The businesses in and around Thomaston, Ga., recognized early on the value of CMS and embraced the program so much that recently they pitched in to buy a billboard declaring that their town was a “Certified Manufacturing Specialist Preferred Community.”

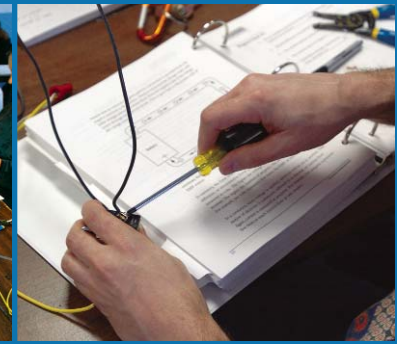
“We have a local CMS advisory committee that meets quarterly at different plants in the area,” says Mark Andrews, HR/Safety manager for Southern Mills’ Thomaston facility, who also is the chair of the local CMS committee, “and we talk about ways to promote CMS to the public and get the word out that there are good manufacturing jobs and this is the way to get in.”

“Manufacturers now realize that this is another tool they can use to develop their workforce,” says Steve Daniel, VP of economic development at Flint River Technical College in Thomaston, who serves on the statewide review committee that helps develop updates to the CMS curriculum. “They promote it internally and provide incentives for people who complete the program.”

“If I see CMS on an application, I’ll interview that person even if I don’t currently have a position open,” Andrews says.

Making it work

In North Georgia, the company TI Automotive has advertised that it guarantees an interview for anybody who is CMS certified, and the offer



has inspired more than 100 area residents to enroll in the program.

“This is truly a win-win situation for all involved,” says Judy Taylor, VP of economic development for North Georgia Technical College. “The company has a trained pool of applicants, North Georgia Tech got the students, and the students enhanced their knowledge, skills, and marketability, whether or not they are hired by TI Automotive.”

“The partnership between TI Automotive and North Georgia Tech is an example of business and industry working with technical colleges to train a workforce in a local community,” says Dr. Ruth Nichols, president of North Georgia Tech. “In order to strengthen the economy in the state, we need to focus on more of these opportunities to work with those businesses that need the support of a technically trained workforce.”

The next level

Executives at the Simmons Company in Waycross, Ga., thought so much of the CMS program that they have made certification a pre-requisite before an applicant even gets an interview for a job at their new plant in Ware County.

Working with Quick Start and Okefenokee Technical College, Simmons has used CMS to establish a higher baseline of qualifications for employees.

“Quick Start and CMS training have more than just a monetary value,” says Michelle Morón, Human Resources advisor at Simmons. “For many people, going through this process has been a life-changing decision.... We’re the success story at Simmons. Our CEO said he had never been to a Simmons facility where the people were as enthusiastic as at our facility here.”

Morón adds that by making CMS a requirement for any candidate to apply, they have helped raise the bar for workforce training in South Georgia.

“This was a paradigm shift for both the employees and employers in the area,” she says. **R**

