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RAMTEC Robotics Summit Addresses Skills Gap

Participants call on educators, manufacturers to continue collaborations

MARION – OCT. 11, 2018 – Educators, state officials and manufacturing leaders united Thursday to discuss how robotics is transforming manufacturing and what's needed to keep the momentum going in Ohio.

The inaugural RAMTEC Robotics Summit celebrated the success of the Tri-Rivers Career Center Robotics and Advanced Manufacturing Technology Education Collaborative now duplicated across the state. Attendees discussed how to address a looming skills gap and its potential economic repercussions.

“There’s 2.5 million jobs that need to be filled,” said Tri-Rivers Superintendent Chuck Speelman. “We understand the need that’s out there and we continue to push forward.”

Participants said solutions must rely on continued collaboration to produce a workforce ready to fill the gap between numbers of retiring engineers and younger skilled workers ready to take their place.

RAMTEC Ohio at Tri-Rivers opened in 2013 to help address that need. Partners created the program to train students on equipment like FANUC, Yaskawa and Universal robots most widely used in industry settings. The facility trains both high school students and adult learners.

Since opening, the RAMTEC training center has certified more than 35 students in industrial maintenance, engineering technology, advanced machining, robotics and welding careers. Ohio Department of Education Straight A grants have funded the creation of 22 more RAMTEC facilities throughout the state.

Ohio Department of Education Senior Executive Director of Student Supports and Education Options Steve Gratz said education must continue to blur the lines between college prep and career tech to ensure the state’s future workers have the skills required by employers.

As an example of potential solutions, he referred to the creation of the OhioMeansJobs Readiness Seal that indicates students have the personal strengths, strong work ethic and

professional experience needed by businesses. The state is working to make sure industries know what the seal indicates when they see it on high school graduates' transcripts.

Ryan Burgess, director of the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation, called on businesses to support a culture of continuous learning to ensure workers keep up with ever changing skills.

"If you're not willing to roll up your sleeves as business people and work with education, not much is going to happen," he said.

Stephen Catt, deputy director of education and workforce development for the Advanced Robotics for Manufacturing collaborative, said education and workforce development must build the right ecosystem for developing technology. He warned a failure to act would lead to threats to the United States' industrial base like a lack of skilled workers, reduced global manufacturing dominance and an overreliance on overseas technology that could even impact national security.

Along with partnerships, the summit involved what must take place to attract students to manufacturing careers. Participants attended learning sessions that let them talk to RAMTEC instructors and students who demonstrated the robots they use in the labs.

Paul Aiello, director of C.E.R.T. sales and operations for FANUC America Corporation, said part of the solution must be to "paint a picture of what opportunities are available in manufacturing" today rather than what's found in history books.

"It's the curriculum that's the glue that holds it all together," said Robert Graff, senior sales manager of Yaskawa Motorman's robotics education workforce development division. He suggested designing curriculum that attracts younger students through means like augmented reality and videos.

Honda North America, Inc. is among manufacturers already answering the call as technology workforce development manager Scot McLemore praised RAMTEC, which assists in training Honda workers. He pledged Honda would continue supporting educational pathways that lead students to high-paying jobs.

For more information on RAMTEC Ohio, visit its website at <https://www.ramtecohio.com>.

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