



# “Right Skills Now” Provides Fast-Track Training for Skilled Manufacturing Jobs

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According to a Skills Gap study by the Manufacturing Institute, more than 80 percent of U.S. manufacturers can't find qualified people for the nearly 600,000 skilled production jobs that are currently unfilled.

For American manufacturing to be successful, employers need machinists that have the right skills, and they need those skills *now*. That is the impetus for a new, fast-track education initiative called Right Skills Now.

The program is an accelerated, 16-week training course for operators of precision machining equipment. It provides classroom and hands-on shop experience to prepare students for immediate employment. It also allows individuals to earn college credit and national industry certifications.

One of the founders of Right Skills Now is Darlene Miller, CEO and owner of Permac Industries in Burnsville, Minn. She helped launch the training

program for CNC machinists in her home state.

As a small business owner representing the manufacturing sector, Ms. Miller was asked to serve for two years on the President's Council for Jobs and Competitiveness. The Jobs Council is comprised of citizens chosen to provide non-partisan advice to the President to help foster economic growth, competitiveness, innovation and job creation.

(Continued on page 2)

## In This Issue...

- Right Skills Now Provides Fast-Track Training for Skilled Manufacturing Jobs
- “The Economy – Where Do We Go From Here?”
- For Minor Servicing and Maintenance (Routine, Repetitive, Integral To Use), Lockout is Not Mandatory
- LinkedIn: Are You Missing a Golden Opportunity to Network?
- Our Newest PMPA Partner: Grainger
- What Are You Doing to Make Your Next Email Campaign a Success?
- PMPA Calendar



Darlene Miller discusses the capabilities of the University of Pittsburgh/VA Human Engineering Research Laboratory with Director Rory A. Cooper, Ph.D. during a recent PCJC listening and action session.



(Continued from page 1)

PMPA provides staff assistance to Ms. Miller for her Jobs Council duties. Miles Free, PMPA's Director of Industry Research and Technology, helped assure that the initial draft curriculum for Right Skills Now focused on delivering relevant skills needed in today's advanced precision machining shops.

According to Ms. Miller, the first time she met with President Obama, she was asked to talk about the economy as it related to manufacturing and small business. "One of the things I said to the President was, 'Not every student needs to go to college,'" she says.

"He had recently made a speech saying that every student should go to college. But he later agreed that while not all students must go to college, they do need some educational training beyond high school.

"I told him that in the precision machining industry, we have an urgent need for skilled people," Ms. Miller continues. "We can't afford to take just anyone off the street, provide some training and then put that person in a machining job."

Despite the nation's high unemployment rate, attracting workers with machining skills has been difficult for small manufacturers. "Because of the recession, we're all strapped financially," Ms. Miller explains. "We need people that have math skills. Our equipment is very high-tech, so we can't afford to hire someone that hasn't had technical training.

"It is critical that new hires have the necessary math and safety skills to understand and operate

the machines," she adds. "There is so much more involved now than there was 10 years ago."

Serving on the Jobs Council with Ms. Miller are some of the country's top corporate leaders from GE, American Express and DuPont. After the council meeting with the President, the members were divided into sub-committees. Ms. Miller was asked to co-chair the High-tech Education Sub-committee with Intel's CEO, Paul Otellini.

The group held meetings and brought in two of Minnesota's technical schools—Dunwoody College of Technology and South Central College. The sub-committee was also able to elicit help from the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM); the National Institute for Metalworking Skills (NIMS); and American College Testing (ACT), the company that developed the testing for applicants. The program has also received funding from the Joyce Foundation.

"To make this work, there had to be a partnership between the business community, the technical schools and organizations like NAM, NIMS and ACT," Ms. Miller emphasizes.

To be eligible for the program, applicants have to pass the ACT test, which is geared towards the machining industry. If an individual doesn't qualify for the program the first time, there are remedial classes available.

"Problem-solving is a huge part of the curriculum," Ms. Miller says. "There is a mix of both class-

room learning and shop time. After 16 weeks, the student will intern at a manufacturing company for eight weeks.

"That person can stay with the company and continue his or her education in a specific field," she adds. Some go into programming, Swiss machining or advanced CNC skills. Others may end up as operations managers, quality managers or even entrepreneurs.

"We intend to replicate Right Skills Now nationally," Ms. Miller sums up. "It's not just for CNC machinists. It can be used for nearly any job skill. The program is so well-defined and accredited, it can be tweaked very easily to train anyone from welders to healthcare technicians."

**If you would like more information on Right Skills Now, visit [rightskillsnow.org](http://rightskillsnow.org)**

Darlene Miller joined Permac Industries in 1992 as an independent sales representative. Two years later, she purchased the struggling manufacturer and turned it around by expanding its capabilities and customer base.

In recognition of Ms. Miller's business achievements, Permac Industries was presented with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Small Business of the Year award for the entire United States in 2008. The Small Business Administration named Ms. Miller the 2006 Minnesota Small Business Person of the Year. She was appointed to the President's Council on Jobs and Competitiveness in February of this year. At the PMPA's annual meeting in October, she was elected second vice president of the association. She is the first female officer in the PMPA's 78-year history.