

Article published Feb 9, 2008

Job training fund offers world of difference

By ALBERT McKEON Telegraph Staff
amckeon@nashuatelegraph.com

MERRIMACK – David Partin has employees clamoring for further training and career advancement.

Partin, a team leader at avionics and electro-optic systems manufacturer Kollsman, can now tell them that training – and a boost in pay – is on the way.

Kollsman just received \$70,000 from the state Job Training Fund. With the company matching the grant, as many as 15 Kollsman manufacturing assemblers can now earn an electronic technician certificate and potentially increase their earnings from \$15 to \$20 an hour.

The assemblers will attend Nashua Community College every other Friday – their normal day off – and take 18 months' worth of courses. With certificates in hand, they can climb a step on the company ladder, from entry-level assembler to the more advanced technician position.

Jack McStravock, the company vice president of human resources, considers the grant a win-win-win.

The assemblers increase their pay by 20 percent and improve their standing in life, McStravock said. Kollsman can gain 10 to 15 new technicians without having to hire from outside, he said. And the newly opened assembly positions will be available to those on the outside seeking entry-level jobs, he said.

McStravock and Kollsman officials opened their doors Friday to Gov. John Lynch, who toured the facility and told workers about the benefits of the Job Training Fund.

"This drives revenues for companies," Lynch said.

Lynch said he made reestablishing the program a priority last year. The governor and legislators kick-started the fund after it went dormant in 2002.

Back then, the program filled its pool essentially with surplus from the state unemployment compensation trust fund, but the program had to stop when the balancing ratio went into the negative, said Colin Manning, spokesman for Lynch. The legislature adjusted it last year so that the Job Training Fund only draws from the administrative side of the unemployment compensation trust fund, he said.

The fund offers \$1 million annually to New Hampshire businesses. So far, more than 200 workers have received training through the fund, Lynch said.

Lucille Jordan, president of New Hampshire Community Technical College in Nashua, said that the would-be technicians will be six credits short of an associate's degree when they receive their certificates. Those remaining credits are from core classes such as English, she said. If the assemblers went as far as earning an associate's degree, they could then transfer to the University of Massachusetts in Lowell, she said.

Kollsman hasn't decided who will qualify for the program, but the company will select them from a pool of more than 50 assemblers. They will take courses such as digital circuitry, micro-processing, and pre-calculus.

The courses will make a world of difference, McStravock and Partin said. Assemblers have a basic manufacturing job, whereas technicians have a more global view of the process and can troubleshoot problems, they said.

Albert McKeon can be reached at 594-5832 or amckeon@nashuatelegraph.com