



## EAMA RSP Hybrid Meeting Notes February 21, 2024

**Welcome** – Chair **Chris Jewell** from **Collins & Jewell** started the meeting at 9:04 a.m. and welcomed two new EAMA RSP members: **Maureen Jerolis**, **Service Side Air, LLC** and **Josh Nason**, **Slater Hill Tool**.

**Employer Accomplishment Sharing** – Chris Jewell congratulated **InCord** on the ribbon cutting of their new building in December, and **Joe Carlone, Jr.** from **Linemaster Switch** on his appointment as President of the Northeastern CT Chamber of Commerce.

**Mary Fitzgerald** from **Acme Wire** shared that she was inducted into the American Manufacturing Hall of Fame.

**Todd Berch** from the **Department of Labor** shared that Electric Boat recently added a cohort of 70 new registered apprentices.

**Update - Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act of 2024** – **Colby Coombs** from **Westminster Tool** gave an update about the new tax bill which includes restoring the full expensing of R&D expenditures in the year they occur; it would also be retroactive to 2022. The bill includes other tax incentives for manufacturers. The bill passed the House with a large majority and now moves over to Senate where it is waiting to be voted on. Senator Blumenthal has added his support; Senator Murphy has not yet voiced his stance. The National Association of Manufacturers is creating a new link with wording about how to email Senators Blumenthal and Murphy asking them to support the bill. Colby also thanked Congressman Courtney for his testimony supporting the bill.

Chris Jewell thanked Colby Coombs for his efforts to move this effort forward and thanked EAMA RSP members as well – stressing that there is strength in numbers.

**Next Steps:** Watch for more information about how you can contact Senators Blumenthal and Murphy.

**Manufacturer Instant Poll** – The poll asked employer members:

**“In your job, what keeps you awake at night?”**

*Choose up to 3.*

- 16 Hiring/Retaining/Training Employees**
- 8 Cost of Doing Business (rent, energy costs, wages, etc.)**
- 8 Sales/Customer Service/Competition**
- 4 Supply Chain Issues**
- 3 Government Compliance**
- 1 Materials Cost/Availability**
- 1 Other**

**65% of the EAMA RSP members who responded said that Hiring / Retaining / Training Employees is the NUMBER ONE reason they lose sleep.**

Eastern Advanced Manufacturing Alliance – A Connecticut Regional Sector Partnership

## Updates from Working Groups

**Workforce & Outreach** – Jeff Dickey from **The Lee Company** reported that, during the meeting in January, the primary question posed was, “How is your workforce hiring/retention going?” Members reported a slight improvement with hiring from a year ago although finding skilled talent is still a challenge. High turnover with early hires is a big problem and it can take hiring 2-5 people to get one person to still be employed in 6 months to a year. Employees “ghosting” interviews or showing up for the job are also a problem.

Brian Grossguth from Miyoshi credited HR Manager Ashley Falke for the improvements she has helped make to their team building, culture, and employee engagement.

The group has created a SharePoint with a discussion board as a way to share best practices and continue the dialogue. The group is currently learning how to use the SharePoint to its best advantage. The working group hopes to share best practices with the full membership in the future.

John Murphy from the Youth Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (YMPI) encouraged members to keep engaging with the schools and bring students in for tours, internships, and job shadowing.

**Next steps:** The next (virtual) meeting of the Workforce & Outreach Working Group will be held on **Wednesday, March 20 at 10:00 a.m.** Members should watch their email for a formal meeting invitation.

**Plastics** – Hannah Belmont, **Westminster Tool**, has assumed the role of Chair of this Working Group. Thank you to **Reid Chamberlin** from **Sonoco** who previously served as Chair.

Hannah shared an update about the Plastics class the Plastics group helped create. Currently running at CT State – Quinebaug Valley (QV), there are 9 students in the Plastics I non-credit class which covers fundamentals of plastics, including material science and polymers. Students in the Plastics II class will do their hands-on training at **Westminster Tool** using their injecting molding machines, and at **Putnam Plastics** to learn about extrusion.

Hannah reminded the group that we are barely at the minimum to run this class so please continue to send students to the program to upskill your current employees and consider recruiting new employees from the program. CT State – QV is exploring creating an online option for Plastics I.

**Next Steps:** Plastics employers who have enrolled students in the program should watch for an email from **Jodi Clarke** from **CT State - QV** requesting employer feedback about the curriculum.

**Business to Business (B2B)** – EAMA RSP Director **Tony Benoit** shared that **Amanda Wiyira, Wepco Plastics**, will take over for **Charles Daniels, Wepco Plastics**, who served as the previous chair. Charles will remain active with EAMA RSP. Thank you, Charles!

A Zoom meeting has been set for **Thursday, March 7 at 11:00 a.m.** to set goals and a meeting schedule for the year. They will also discuss what activities can be developed for members regarding their business development efforts within the region and to keep the supply chain within Connecticut.

**Next Steps:** If you are interested in joining the B2B Working Group, please contact EAMA RSP Director Tony Benoit at [eamarsp@gmail.com](mailto:eamarsp@gmail.com).

## Director's Report

**MPI Curriculum Documentation Process** – Jess Key from **Electric Boat (EB)** updated the group about the status of the Welding curriculum review. Jess's team is currently working on rolling in all the input from all their current training partners, as well as their partners at Newport News, Virginia. She recognized

that EAMA RSP members are very busy but said that the invitation to comment on the welding package is not a “closed door” if members were unable to participate in the welding review, and that they welcome feedback as part of their commitment to continuous improvement even after the curriculum is deployed.

The welding curriculum is being piloted at Porter & Chester. This version is slightly longer than the current MPI welding class (about 2 weeks longer) but Jess feels that the actual deployment will go faster and the final package should be more closely aligned to the length of the current MPI training.

The next package that will be available for review is the **Machining Curriculum**. EB will send the learning objectives to Tony Benoit (around March 22). If members are interested in receiving any particular training module(s) on the learning objectives list, EB will send those specific modules.

**Next Steps:** EAMA RSP members who are interested in reviewing the MPI Machining curriculum package should contact Tony Benoit at [eamarsp@gmail.com](mailto:eamarsp@gmail.com).

**NEW Working Group – Youth Pipeline** – Tony reminded the group that results from the October 2022 survey about EAMA RSP’s strategic objectives indicated that expanding the future manufacturing workforce pipeline was members’ top priority. The Steering Committee has endorsed creation of a Youth Pipeline Working Group. This is a particularly good time since EWIB has grant funding it is using to contract with ReadyCT to help the YPMI increase capacity, improve consistency, strengthen career readiness, and strengthen the work-based learning component.

**Next Steps:** If you are interested in joining the Youth Pipeline Working Group, contact Tony Benoit at [eamarsp@gmail.com](mailto:eamarsp@gmail.com). A meeting will be scheduled in March.

**Energy Savings Webinar** – Results from EAMA RSP employer instant polls indicated that energy costs and conservation was a high priority. Tony is working with Connect Energy Resources to put together a webinar on some fairly simple things members can do that will affect their energy rates for at least a year.

**Next Steps:** Watch for more details about a date for the energy savings webinar.

### Updates on EAMA RSP Responsibilities & Initiatives

**Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (MPI)** - Carol LaBelle from EWIB reported that there have been 66 MPI classes from July 1, 2023, through February 19, 2024, with an additional 26 classes scheduled by June 30, 2024, a total of about 92 classes in one program year. We have enrolled 789 students and expect to enroll another 300, serving over 1,100 people this year.

Carol reminded the group about the availability of Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) funding which can help pay for classes such as the Plastic class; On-the-Job Training (OJT) funding is also available.

**Learn More:** Members are encouraged to contact a Business Services Rep to learn more about Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) or On-the-Job Training (OJT) funding: Jeff Martel - [jmartel@qvcc.edu](mailto:jmartel@qvcc.edu) (860) 428-1854; Joelle Garrett – [jgarrett@chamberect.com](mailto:jgarrett@chamberect.com), (860) 941-6234

**Youth Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (YMPI)** - David Allard from EWIB encouraged members to participate in the Greater Norwich Chamber of Commerce (GNACC) YMPI **Manufacturing Career Fair** at the Holiday Inn in Norwich on **Friday, May 3, from 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.** This event is primarily for high school seniors who are enrolled in manufacturing training, juniors who are looking to join the YMPI next year, or seniors who were not in the YMPI but have an interest in the adult MPI.

On March 8 there will be a YMPI Instructor Professional Development event at the Manufacturing Apprenticeship Center (MAC) in Groton to prepare YMPI instructors to support the final student evaluations.

Through ReadyCT, we are starting a program focused on career readiness. The 10-part series which has started at many YMPI schools focuses on ethics, goal setting, motivation, and workplace etiquette. The Yes Academy is a 4-day stand-alone event that targets high school seniors not currently in a pipeline program who are looking to go into the workforce immediately after graduation.

**Networking Event** – Chair Chris Jewell thanked **Jeff Dickey** from **The Lee Company** for offering their facility for our next networking event, which will include tours of their facility and museum, refreshments and networking with other members and support partners.

**Next Steps:** Save the date: **Wednesday, May 15, 4:30-6:30 p.m.** Watch for an invitation coming soon.

**Partner Corner** – Chair Chris Jewell introduced **Paul Striebel**, Program Manager, from the **CT Center for Advanced Technology (CCAT)** to talk about the recently re-funded **Manufacturing Voucher Program (MVP)**.

Paul mentioned that, in addition to the MVP, there are many funding programs available to CT manufacturers. Funding is made available through the CT Dept. of Economic and Community Development (DECD) through the Manufacturing Innovation Fund (MIF). There is the potential for CT manufacturers to receive up to \$300,000 in funding. He encouraged members to review the programs and criteria and to take advantage of as many opportunities as possible.

The **MVP** is one of the most popular programs, with \$30 million awarded to date. Manufacturers who meet the criteria can participate even if they have participated in the past up to the lifetime cap of \$100,000.

Among the eligibility requirements are company size, 3-100 full-time employees, and project value at least \$25,000. The MVP has a match requirement which varies: For the first application the match is two-thirds of the total project cost, which can be up to \$100,000; for subsequent applications the match is three-quarters of the total project cost. Companies must apply before purchasing the equipment. Funding uses include any type of project that will impact productivity, efficiency and competitiveness.

**Manufacturing Intern Program** – **Eileen Candels** from **CCAT** highlighted the Manufacturing Internship Program (MIP), which includes an upcoming webinar featuring Hannah Belmont from Westminster Tool as a panelist. Manufacturers can post their internship opportunities, have access to the resume database, and participate in a statewide Manufacturing, Engineering & Technology Career Fair at Quinnipiac University on Thursday, April 11.

**Learn More:** For more information about the **MVP** and other available funding opportunities, visit <https://www.ccat.us/programs/>. Contact Paul Striebel, [pstriebel@ccat.us](mailto:pstriebel@ccat.us).

For more information about the **MIP**, contact Eileen Candels, [ecandels@ccat.us](mailto:ecandels@ccat.us).

**News of Interest** – Chairman Chris Jewell highlighted the following items:

He offered congratulations to EAMA RSP member **ThayerMahan** on their recent \$19.3 million contract from the Department of Defense to continue the development of their autonomous maritime sensing technology. He also saluted EAMA RSP member **The Lee Company's CEO, Marietta Lee**, as a *Hartford Business Journal* "Five to Watch in 2024" honoree.

Chris also noted **U.S. Department of Labor Acting Secretary Julie Su**'s January visit to Norwich Free Academy (NFA) with U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney to learn about NFA's Youth Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (YMPI) and other NFA career pathway programs. Chris noted four U.S. Secretaries of Labor have visited Eastern CT and it is wonderful to see the national attention our programs are receiving.

Lastly, he encouraged members to review the **Manufacturing Innovation Fund (MIF) Annual Report** which contains statistics about the manufacturing industry in Connecticut, as well as a synopsis of the wide variety of initiatives and funding opportunities available to manufacturers.

**Learn more:** Find the MIF Annual Report [here](#).

**Next EAMA RSP meeting:** Wednesday April 17 at 9:00 a.m.