

## **South Paris Company Gets the M.O.S.T. Out of New Program**

SOUTH PARIS – The Maine Machine Products Co. of South Paris has six new machine operators thanks to the Machine Operators Skills Training Grant (M.O.S.T.), a six -New England state innovative program funded by the U.S. Department of Labor.

The M.O.S.T. program, administered by the six New England divisions of the Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP), including Maine MEP, fills two needs by equipping out-of-work skilled laborers with new skills and helping local manufacturers fill a rapidly increasing number of vacant Computerized Numerical Control (CNC) machine operator positions with these trainees.

“The first manufacturer to participate in the program was Maine Machine Products Co.,” said Michael Lambert, project manager for the Maine MEP. “Recently, they hired six of the first nine machinists trained under the M.O.S.T. program. The company is quite pleased with the results.”

“The six individuals hired out of the M.O.S.T. training are contributing associates after just a few weeks of on-the-job training,” said Thomas Galley, chief operating officer at Maine Machine Products Co.

Lambert said one of the most rewarding aspects of the program is that non-traditional workers are being recruited to fill the spots. “We are working with the Career Centers in Maine to find people who are not necessarily looking for jobs in the machinery trade,” he said.

“In fact, most of the newly trained machine operators were unemployed or under-employed individuals in another profession altogether,” Lambert said.

The program is intended to offer participating companies a competitive edge in the future. “A machinist is highly skilled,” Lambert said. “However, with modern CNC equipment, it is not necessary to have a skilled machinist on each machine.”

By using machine operators to load the machines, conduct inspections and unload the finished product, companies will reduce production costs and become more competitive.

Training for the new machine operators takes place in a mobile unit which is fully outfitted with 12 computer work stations and two miniature machining centers. The total immersion training is done over a two-week period and evaluations are conducted each day of the training.

“The companies who participate in the program have to agree to hire a number of the newly trained machine operators,” Lambert said, “and also take part in Time Wise®, Principles of Lean Manufacturing classes.”

In the case of Maine Machine Products, 52 individuals received ‘lean’ training, which is designed to foster cultural change, as well as introduce lean concepts and tools that help build a more efficient organization.

Lambert said the M.O.S.T. program was a natural for Maine Machine Products.

Founded in 1956, the company is a precision custom manufacturer of components and assemblies for targeted high-technology markets. The company runs two shifts in order to provide more than 155 certified “just-in-time” products and assemblies for national and international companies in the medical, semiconductor and telecommunication industries. It also provides products for the defense and high-tech commercial markets.

Company officials indicate, however, they were finding it increasingly more difficult to identify and hire qualified employees for their automated machining operations. They tried to solve the problem through internal training and apprenticeship, as well as participating in seed programs.

“Although those efforts were producing positive results, the output of these programs was not filling the ever increasing need,” Lambert said. “That’s why company officials were so eager to participate in the M.O.S.T. program. They are very pleased with the results.”

Galley said not only are company officials pleased with the results, but many of the company’s 140 skilled employees have also been impressed.

“The M.O.S.T. program was a great success, and pleasantly surprised even the experienced machinists on the shop floor who were skeptical at the beginning of the program,” Galley said.

In addition, the lean training component has been well received. In fact, many individual contributors are now participating in a plant-wide lean transformation that the company has undertaken.

Galley said, “The Time Wise® 101 training is one of the best designed one-day seminars that we have participated in and provided timely, positive and fun reinforcement to our already existing Continuous Improvement Program.”

The MOST program has been such a success for Maine Machine Products. The company has intentions to engage in a second round of M.O.S.T. training in the fall, which is expected to generate more new jobs.

The South Paris CareerCenter assisted the M.O.S.T. training program with recruitment, testing assessment, monitoring of progress, job development, and follow up.

The mobile training unit was stationed at the South Paris CareerCenter for the training period. Nine participants started the 2 week program and all successfully completed the training. Diane Peet Business Consultant at the CareerCenter stated that “at this time 8 of those participants are working full time. The program was deemed a success due to the cooperation of all partners involved.” Peet added.

Heidi Hamann with the CareerCenter said “The South Paris CareerCenter is excited about the prospect of a second round of M.O.S.T. training being offered in the fall 2006. It is a great opportunity for our customers and community.” The South Paris CareerCenter is operated by Western Maine Community Action.