Apprenticeship Randolph

set to bridge gap between workforce, industry

Editor's Note: There are plenty of workers in Randolph County. There are plenty of manufacturing jobs in the area. However, manufacturing has changed dramatically. Today's manufacturing jobs require more than a high school diploma. The jobs require technical skills. Randolph County's workforce does not currently offer local industries a large pool of qualified personnel.

“Without a doubt, the demand for skilled labor is increasing. The needs of our workforce and industry are changing,” said Chris Harrington, director of operations, said. “The skills you need; we can’t find it. So we’ve got to develop it ourselves.”

Four entities are working together to develop much-needed talent within the community — Randolph County Schools (RCS), Randolph Community College (RCC), Asheboro-Randolph Chamber of Commerce and members of the manufacturing industry.

For years, each sector has been looking for a way to connect the dots and meet the needs of students, the workforce and industry. One of the largest roadblocks to success has been the interest gap, or the disconnect between public perception and modern manufacturing. “There’s this negative stigma to manufacturing,” Harrington said. “Frankly, it’s hard to get the younger people interested.”

RCC recently launched Reality Redesign, a competition for teens that is targeted at closing the interest gap.

Current career opportunities

Apprenticeship Randolph will open the door for participants in the following careers:

- Tool and Die Maker/Mold Maker
- CNC Machinist
- Machinist
- Maintenance Technician
- Process Technician
- Welder
- Mold/Plastics Technician
- Electronics Technician
- Robotics Technician
- Mechanical/Electrical Technician
- Medical Knitting Technician
- Automation Technician
- Instrumentation Technician

As the program grows, apprenticeship opportunities could expand into nursing, other health care careers, the automotive industry and more.

At the same time, RCS has taken the lead on recruiting students from its school system as well as Asheboro City Schools, Uwharrie Charter School and the home-school community to participate in the inaugural year of Apprenticeship Randolph.

What is Apprenticeship Randolph?

Modeled after Guilford Apprenticeship Partners (GAP), Apprenticeship Randolph is a four-year educational and on-the-job training program. Students accepted as apprentices will begin taking college courses at RCC during their senior year of high school, while also working in the industry.

“Randolph County’s industries have partnered with us in so many ways as RCC has continued to help thousands of people build a better future for themselves and fulfill hopes, plans, goals and dreams,” RCC President Dr. Robert S. Shackleford said. “Since Apprenticeship Randolph will allow students to have educational and industry experiences at the same time, the program will provide a unique immersion in advanced manufacturing and provide students with an avenue for students to build toward a successful career.”

The company that selects the apprentice will pay the student an hourly wage. While the student is still in high school, the Career and College Promise (CCP) will pay the cost of tuition and books. Once the student has graduated from school, the company that selected the apprentice will pay the remaining tuition cost.
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high school, a grant will pay the cost of college tuition and the company will cover the cost of books. Should the grant program be discontinued, the company will step in to pay the cost of tuition.

The students will not have to pay for tuition or books and will earn $8 per hour in year one. By year four, the students will be earning $13.50 per hour.

The charter is serving as the program’s fiscal agent, which is set up through the Asbolutely/Randleman chamber of commerce, a charitable 501(c)3 organization. Participating companies must pay a $1,000 fee to participate and can opt in or out at any time. However, once the program is set up as a nonprofit organization, the companies may claim a tax deduction for donations.

The structure also allows the schools and RCC to ascertain the possibility of holding fundraisers for the program.

The ability to offer a guaranteed job opportunity to donate may encourage some students to consider the program, especially as corporate sponsorship, as well as corporate sponsorships, is on the decrease, according to their President, said.

Upon completion of the first year of college, each student will have received a Manufacturing Technology Associates in Applied Science degree as well as a portable Journeyman’s certificate issued by the N.C. Department of Commerce and U.S. Department of Labor.

Apprenticeship versus a four-year college degree

In December, information sessions were held for students at the high schools. During the presentation, data was shared that compared the cumulative cash flow of an N.C. Triangle Apprenticeship Program (NTAP) participant and an N.C. State University engineering student.

The comparison revealed that four years after high school graduation, the apprentice would have earned an AAS degree, Journeyman’s certificate and a minimum wage of $122,000. The N.C. State student would have accumulated over $37,000 of debt and may or may not have graduated and still has to find a job.

Supporters of an apprenticeship program provide the part-time, 6-40 hours of work experience and the skills local employers need for high-paying manufacturing jobs, thus closing the skills gap.

Lining it up — Alston Shalton, a Randleman High School sophomore, recently completed Metal 1, which will look good on a future Apprenticeship application.

“Even if it’s unrelated, we want to see that they’re shown an interest,” Harrington said. “Even if they want to work with their hands, they want to create something.”

Program administrators are also looking for a candidate with good attendance, defined as no more than five absences per year.

The application process

For the program’s first year, applications from high school juniors and seniors will be accepted. Informational sessions were held at area high schools in December 2016. Two additional informational sessions at RCC are scheduled for April 6, 2017, and April 12, 2017.

Applications will be accepted for training beginning in March 2017.

Meet a future applicant

Apprenticeship Randolph’s success is tied to the interest it can garner among high school students in Randolph County. Due to the high circulation of the program’s newsletter, interest shown in the program has been high. Students will participate in 15 hours of training over three years. About two-thirds of applicants will be offered apprenticeships.

Alston Shalton, a sophomore at Randleman High School, is interested in the program. He said he is interested in the program because he enjoys working with his hands.

“Right now I’m enrolled in an associate’s degree in HVAC technology,” he said. “I plan on being an HVAC technician and then maybe go to community college to get my journeyman’s license.”

Requirements for Apprenticeship Randolph

Academically, students must have a minimum unweighted grade point average of 2.5 to apply for an apprenticeship. Also required are successful completion of Math 1, 2 and 3, and community college placement test results.

Applicants will have coursework in electronics, automotive technology, robotics, mechanics, construction, apparel and textile production, and computer science.

“Time is an important factor,” Shalton said. “For students who are interested in the program, they’ll have to apply in the spring of their junior year.”

Shalton said that “it’s a great way to earn money while you’re in high school.”

The program is open to students who are interested in the program and who meet the requirements.

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