



Working together reaps rewards



SEEING OPPORTUNITY IN TEAMWORK: Fred Santaniello, left, director, workforce training grants and programs, and coordinator of the SAMI program, works with students Rob Santos, center, and Teddy Small, in one of New England Tech's labs.
PBN PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

BY TARYN PLUMB | Contributing Writer

PROGRESS DOESN'T OCCUR IN A VACUUM. It takes dedication, persistence, enthusiasm – and, most importantly, cooperation.

All of these traits are inherent in the **New England Institute of Technology** and its administration, which has committed itself to infusing the state with the skilled, quality workers it needs to keep its economic engine not only running, but gunning forward into the future.

Specifically, the private, nonprofit college based in East Greenwich has established the Shipbuilding/Marine Trades and Advanced Manufacturing Institute, a landmark cooperative effort of national, state and local entities.

"It's a natural offshoot of what we do every day," said Steven H. Kitchin, New England Tech's vice president of corporate education and training. "We prepare our graduates for professional and technical careers through programs developed to meet labor-market demand, and SAMI fits right into that mission."

Now celebrating its 75th year, New England Tech offers associate, bachelor's and master's degrees in more than 40 programs under the tutelage of 300 faculty members. With its main campus in East Greenwich and secondary campuses in Warwick, its focus is

to provide students with a solid balance of analytical skills and hands-on training.

Since 2005, nearly 12,000 students have graduated from the school, and are now employed at more than 4,000 companies, 2,000 of those in Rhode Island.

In keeping with that history, SAMI's

objective is simple, but essential: To provide general information, career counseling, hands-on orientation, training and skill development – and, ultimately, the crucial foot-in-the-door to potential employers. It's all free of charge to Rhode Islanders looking to re-enter the workforce.

New England Tech is focusing on producing a crop of workers for well-paying, high-demand jobs such as shipbuilding, pipe fitting, machining and welding – with ship fitting, pipe welding and robotics programs forthcoming, according to school officials.

The program has been supported by \$5 million in two grants from the U.S. Department of Labor, as well as \$440,000 from the Governor's Workforce Board, and \$50,000 from the Rhode Island Foundation through its Make It Happen RI initiative.

The positions being most heavily touted were identified through a comprehensive-needs market analysis, as well as ongoing collaborations and partnerships with employers and programs across the state, including General Dynamics Electric Boat, Senesco Marine, the Rhode Island Marine Trades Association and the Rhode Island Manufacturers Association.

The program "came about as a result of several conversations that we had with multiple parties," said Kitchin. "We came to the conclusion that there were multiple needs that could be addressed."

For instance, machinists, whose average salary is \$20.69 an hour, are in demand in medical, chemical and advanced manufacturing settings. According to New England Tech administrators, manufacturers will continue to rely heavily on skilled machinists as they invest in new equipment, modify production techniques and more rapidly implement product design changes.

New England Tech's philosophy of "responding quickly to employer demand, utilizing new technology and adapting to change" was ultimately the foundation of the SAMI workforce program, according to college officials. By fostering longstanding relationships with Rhode Island employers, the college was in a unique position to understand what jobs had been going unfulfilled.

As of January, 158 unemployed adults had been served through SAMI, with 110 finding jobs at an average starting wage of \$16.18 an hour.

In turn, symbiotic relationships help to create awareness of SAMI and the college's other programs. Specifically, the R.I. Department of Labor and Training's one-stop centers across the state are prime sources of referrals, according to school officials, as are local community-action programs, veterans' organizations and an active social media presence.

Ultimately, New England Tech's mindset is that relationships are the key to good business – as well as to helping Rhode Island flourish.

"We're constantly shifting focus at the college, based on the demand-side need," said Kitchin. "We're significantly and acutely aware of working with our partners." ■

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