

Goodwill Toward All Manufacturing Men and Women

Goodwill Industries International Inc. is known for its retail thrift stores, which raise billions of dollars by selling donated clothes and household items. While the stores are great for bargain hunters, they also serve a greater societal role: funding critical career-building services for disadvantaged people.

In fact, more than 85 percent of store revenues goes directly toward supporting community-based programs—including employment training and job placement services.

As part of the training initiative, local Goodwill organizations partner with industry leaders to provide job seekers with the skills employers want. In 2021, nearly 2 million people received services from Goodwill to help grow their careers, and more than 123,000 people were placed into jobs in the U.S.

MoKan Do Attitude

Goodwill of Western Missouri and Eastern Kansas (MoKan Goodwill) is a good example of how the non-profit organization has formed innovative partnerships to help underprivileged residents. This includes teaming up with Tooling U-SME, the workforce development division of SME, on manufacturing certification classes.

The Kansas City-based group, which has provided community assistance for more than 125 years, uses its resources to empower people through the power of work. And it is constantly striving to improve and add new services.

“Early in 2022, we decided to implement a manufacturing vocational training program as part of our vocational training offerings in the Kansas City area, so a few of us attended an event put on by the Missouri Association of Manufacturers,” explained Katherine Maloney, MoKan Goodwill’s vice president of workforce development. “It was at this event we learned about Tooling-U SME’s Certified Manufacturing Associate (CMfgA) certification, and it seemed to be exactly what we were looking for.”

With the ongoing labor shortage and stagnate wages, such initiatives are critical to match qualified job seekers with employers. In addition to providing skills training to help employees land good-paying jobs, manufacturers can fill talent pipelines with individuals they know are going to hit the ground running. It’s a win-win for both sides.

“The need for a skilled workforce is one of the most significant challenges to manufacturing’s future growth and

prosperity,” asserted Jeannine Kunz, SME’s chief workforce development officer. She warned that the current skills gap could result in more than 2.1 million manufacturing jobs in the U.S. going unfilled by 2030.

Certified Results

Introduced by SME in 2021, CMfgA is an industry certification focused on basic manufacturing concepts. It is designed for individuals new to manufacturing who may not currently possess enough knowledge or experience for more advanced technical certifications. Successful completion of the course demonstrates a person’s potential for high-demand, entry-level manufacturing roles.

“Knowing this course was designed for those with limited or no experience was perfect for us because most job seekers participating in the workforce development programs at Goodwill are unemployed or underemployed,” Maloney explained. “If we can help them earn their certification, we can put them on the fast track to promising full-time jobs that pay a livable wage, which is something they wouldn’t necessarily have access to otherwise.”

Through the end of 2022, 33 out of 39 people who enrolled in the MoKan Goodwill program earned their certification, including 18 students who earned post-program placement with manufacturing companies in the greater Kansas City area. Graduates earn an average of \$17.50 per hour, which is more than \$6 higher than Missouri’s current minimum wage.

Goodwill provides services throughout the employment process, including help with transportation, childcare, and housing. The inclusive program supports people with different abilities and special needs such as physical challenges, cognitive disorders, and limited education and work history.

Hands-On Training

The CMfgA program lasts three weeks, during which students attend “blended learning” classes. The mix includes hands-on training in a lab in partnership with Missouri Enterprise (part of the MEP National Network to strengthen U.S. manufacturers) and in-person classroom instruction.

In the lab, students partake in basic measurement procedures with instructors, using calipers and micrometers in scenarios that simulate how this skillset would apply to a real-world manufacturing situation. They also learn how to

implement proper lockout/tagout practices and procedures that will safeguard workers from hazardous energy release, which helps prevent serious injuries. Robotics training is being added in 2023.

“We built a space where the students could take the knowledge they gleaned during the classroom portion of the training and put it to use in a scenario they would encounter if they were working in manufacturing,” Maloney explained. “We’ve also invested in virtual reality headsets that allow students to do manufacturing-focused simulations that are nearly identical to the real thing.”

This enables participants to show how they can take direct knowledge of the skills they learned and put them to use immediately.

“Creative partnerships with industry leaders such as Goodwill are essential to developing a diverse next generation of industry professionals, providing them with the knowledge and tools needed for successful careers,” SME’s Kunz noted. “Earning a CMfgA certification is a great start and indicates to employers the holder is ready to start their manufacturing journey.”

Community Success

One of the manufacturing companies taking advantage of the CMfgA certification is North Kansas City-based Tnemec Inc., which specializes in high-performance coatings and linings. With 10 locations across North America, Tnemec is always looking for well-trained applicants, which makes the Goodwill-SME program a great fit.

Tnemec was approached in summer 2022 to participate with Goodwill and help individuals who needed opportunities to find their footing and, perhaps, land full-time work that would set them up for future success.

“We believe in providing opportunities for those who might not get a second chance at a career,” said Ron Schimmel, Tnemec’s director of operations and manufacturing. “The program with Goodwill allows us to fill employment needs within the company and teaches these individuals how to be good employees.”

Tnemec has participated in four interview sessions at MoKan Goodwill with students who have earned their CMfgA.

During the process, the manufacturer has identified several potential job candidates—at least one is already on the payroll and contributing to the company’s success.

Brad Cox, who earned a CMfgA through the MoKan Goodwill program, is putting his training to use as a full-time employee with Tnemec. He became aware of the opportunity through the Transitional Center of Kansas City, where he was



CMfgA students on their last day of class being recognized for completing the course, passing their final exam, and receiving their Tooling U certification.

living after serving a jail sentence. In addition to finding him a place to live, MoKan Goodwill helped put Cox on the path toward full-time employment that paid a decent wage.

“I was tired of living in transitional living every day, so this program offered a way out,” Cox said. “I graduated from the program in three weeks, and landed a job at Tnemec after learning their needs and my skills were a great fit. ... (Now) I’m able to look into housing for myself now, which I couldn’t do if I wasn’t gainfully employed.”

The participants in the CMfgA program are the real heroes. Their effort and commitment sets themselves up for success.

“The real benefit of the program is the work the individuals put in to earn it,” Maloney said. “We don’t just rubber stamp their certification. When they graduate, they are in a place where they can bring real value to the companies that hire them, and they feel better about themselves for stepping up and doing something to better their lives.” ➡

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