

Friday, October 9, 2015

## **Manufacturing = opportunity**

New Hampshire's Manufacturing Week is Oct. 6-9, a time to highlight the world-class manufacturing companies in our state. However, young people seem averse to getting into the industry despite its many benefits.

With the school year underway, lots of students are thinking about their futures and deciding what path is best for them after high school graduation. Four-year college isn't for everyone. In fact, nearly two-thirds of New Hampshire youth do not attend four-year universities. I was one of those people. I went directly into the retail workforce after high school, but I recently made the switch to manufacturing. I wish I had made it sooner.

In New Hampshire and across the country, there is a misconception about jobs in manufacturing. It can make many people hesitant about pursuing a job in the sector when images of stifling, dirty warehouses come to mind.

This could not be farther from the reality. Local companies like Atrium Medical in Hudson are high tech operations that have a great deal to offer people from all backgrounds seeking full time positions, overtime opportunities and prospects for considerable career growth. Parents should consider this career path as a positive and viable option for their children's future.

Last summer, after nearly eight years in retail, I started working in medical device manufacturing at Atrium. In the past year, my decision has allowed me to return to school, increase my salary and benefits, and most importantly, spend far more time with my family.

With no prior experience in manufacturing, I applied with a temporary staffing firm, Operon Resource Management, a health-care staffing agency. At Operon, I took part in a training program like none I had ever experienced before. The training materials were helpful and unique and the lessons and quizzes were individually tailored to my own learning style. If a certain department was not the right fit, I had the ability to try other areas and get matched with the best unit for me, rather than being deemed incompatible and let go.

Through Operon, I received a temporary position at Atrium, where I was able to choose hours that worked with my schedule. This was not a luxury I had at my

previous job at a toy store retail chain. Soon after I started, I was offered a permanent position with Atrium, and not long after that, I was promoted to team leader.

As the third-shift team lead, I oversee the endovascular department, "Endo" for short, for my eight-hour shift. Most recently, a supervisor position opened up, proving once again that there is ample room for growth in this industry.

In the Endo department, we make small, metal cardiac stents which are inserted into a patient's arteries and veins to open them up and maintain blood flow. This is worlds apart from my previous jobs and is fulfilling - we make instruments that save lives! With the improvements I've seen in my family life and my career, I am thrilled about where I am in life, and encourage other people to explore a career in medical device manufacturing.

Many of my full time co-workers are also in classrooms working toward their degrees and others, like myself, are taking classes online. The manufacturing industry is a growing one, and with the opportunities that it offers to such a diverse pool of job seekers, it is a career path that people shouldn't overlook.

With a 10-year-old and 13-year-old, I needed to choose a flexible line of work that would afford me the time to spend with them and my husband. Since last June, my new career in manufacturing has allowed me to do exactly that.

I have maintained my full time schedule with earnable overtime while saving money on day care and being able to attend my kids' sports practices in the evenings and games on the weekends. I am also working toward my degree in business administration from Southern New Hampshire University. These huge improvements to my family and personal life, as well as the increase in pay and benefits from my previous career, have been more than I could ever have asked for from a career change to manufacturing.

My quickly growing manufacturing career has been a huge milestone for me, and it's only appropriate during Manufacturing Week to highlight this career opportunity for others. I hope more people will consider manufacturing to help them jump start their own fresh starts that will undoubtedly bring a bright future.

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