

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, December 22, 2011
207-623-0680

For more information contact:
Muriel Mosher

Training Unemployed Workers for Jobs in Manufacturing, Maine MEP Graduates First M.O.S.T.® Welding Class

Governor's Pilot Program Helps Lewiston Employer Meet Workforce Needs

Lewiston, Maine – A new model for delivering job training to unemployed workers today graduated its first class of trainees. Nine previously unemployed workers completed the first phase of the Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnership's (Maine MEP) Mobile Outreach Skills Training (M.O.S.T.®) program and will receive offers of employment from WahlcoMetroflex, a leading engineering and manufacturing firm based in Lewiston.

The M.O.S.T.® program is a rapid response skills training and job placement program that is tailored to specific employment opportunities. It provides customized training in high-tech mobile classrooms for Maine manufacturers in exchange for a commitment from an employer to hire trainees who successfully complete the two-week intensive training program. The inaugural class for WahlcoMetroflex focused on welding training to meet the company's need for additional welders.

"The M.O.S.T.® program developed out of a paradox that faces Maine's manufacturing community. At a time of high unemployment, many Maine manufacturers find their ability to grow limited by the shortage of skilled workers. M.O.S.T.® is designed to address this obstacle by rapidly training unemployed workers for careers in manufacturing," said Bruce Pulkkinen, chair of the Maine MEP Board of Directors.

Funded in part by the Maine Departments of Labor and Economic and Community Development, and the Unity Foundation, the M.O.S.T.® job training initiative received strong support from Governor Paul LePage. The Governor toured Maine MEP's mobile training unit when it visited the State House earlier this year and encouraged the organization to launch a pilot program.

"The M.O.S.T.® program represents a new model of putting Maine people back to work. It's training for a job, and ultimately a career, not training for training's sake. And because the program first identifies the workforce needs of manufacturers, it can rapidly train and place unemployed workers into jobs. It's a classic win-win-win. Unemployed workers get jobs. Manufacturers get skilled and motivated workers. And the state sees a reduction in unemployment," said Governor LePage.

The program begins by canvassing manufacturers to identify job opportunities. After working with a company to determine what it needs in terms of workers and skill sets, the MEP staff develops a training curriculum based on the employer's skills requirements. This customization shortens the length of time needed for trainees to become productive employees.

The MEP staff then provides the initial HR review, working with Maine Career Centers to identify a pool of unemployed workers and screening prospective applicants. This HR function is particularly important for small manufacturers that lack specialized HR departments. The company interviews the candidates from a well-qualified pool of applicants and selects the trainees.

After a screening and selection process, candidates enter an intensive two-week targeted skills training program aboard a high-tech mobile classroom brought to the employer's place of business. With WahlcoMetroflex, the mobile unit was located at the company's Lewiston headquarters. Over the next six months, the M.O.S.T.® program team will provide on-the-job training and mentoring to develop the

trainees' skills proficiency and ensure a high job retention rate, which is critical to employers.

"We're very pleased to participate in the inaugural training program in Maine," said Don Mondor, manufacturing manager for WahlcoMetroflex. "Maine MEP's customized training rapidly gets trainees up to speed so that they can walk from the classroom onto the shop floor and immediately become productive team members. And the candidate screening that Maine MEP performs ensured we got very qualified job applicants."

The M.O.S.T.® program has proved to be a success in states where it has been implemented, with a training completion rate of 97 percent, a job placement rate of 95 percent, and a job retention rate after six months of 91 percent. These results far exceed the placement and retention rates of traditional job training programs at only a fraction of the cost per job.

"The fastest way to reduce unemployment is to train unemployed workers for existing job vacancies. But to do so requires flexibility and customization. For many of Maine's high tech manufacturers, a cookie-cutter approach to training is not efficient. The M.O.S.T.® program is an innovative way of delivering workforce training at a company's doorstep. It shows that we can spur job growth by giving companies the skilled workers they need," said Maine Commissioner of Labor Robert J. Winglass.

The Maine Labor Commissioner expressed satisfaction that the initial training class included three unemployed veterans.

"The Unity Foundation is proud to support the effort to train unemployed Maine veterans for careers in manufacturing. We owe returning members of the armed forces a debt of gratitude for their service to the country. By providing this grant funding, we can help these veterans embark on productive civilian careers in Maine," said Larry Sterrs, chairman and CEO of the Maine-based Unity Foundation.

"The holiday season can be a stressful time for unemployed workers, but the graduates from the M.O.S.T.® program can look to the New Year with optimism, knowing that jobs await them at WahlcoMetroflex," said Mary LaFontaine, manager of the Lewiston Career Center. "We look forward to working with Maine MEP on future training classes."

Maine MEP Board Chair Pulkkinen noted the benefit to graduates of being able to train on the latest, state-of-the-art virtual simulation welding tools.

"Maine MEP would like to thank Lincoln Electric, the manufacturer of the virtual reality arc welding simulators that are installed on the M.O.S.T.® mobile training unit. These simulators provide excellent real-time feedback to trainees and enable them to perform far more repetitions that they normally would complete in comparable training programs. Lincoln Electric has been very helpful in training our instructors, so we can put people back to work," Pulkkinen said.

About Maine MEP

Maine MEP is an affiliate of the NIST under the U.S. Department of Commerce. The national MEP is a network of manufacturing extension centers that provide business and technical assistance to smaller manufacturers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Through MEP, manufacturers have access to more than 2000 manufacturing and business "coaches" whose job is to help firms make changes that lead to greater productivity, increased profits, and enhanced global competitiveness. For more information on the Maine MEP program call 1-800-637-4634 or visit www.mainemep.org.