

EDITOR'S PICK

Western New York manufacturing and tech coalition puts focus on jobs

Matt Glynn

Apr 15, 2025

Local manufacturers, including Moog Inc., were struggling to find trained workers for a specific job.

They needed finishing and deburring technicians, who are responsible for putting finishing touches on machined parts that go into airplanes, space vehicles and other applications.

"They're very critical," said Stephen Tucker, president and CEO of the Northland Workforce Training Center. "It's almost like a jewelry maker doing final touches on an expensive piece of jewelry."





Stephen Tucker is executive director of the Western New York Manufacturing and Tech Coalition.

Derek Gee/Buffalo News

This is where the Western New York Manufacturing and Tech Workforce Coalition came in – and how nine people ended up getting jobs.

The coalition was **formed in late 2023** to identify gaps in the region's manufacturing and tech workforce and develop solutions. In the case of finishing and deburring technicians, the Northland Workforce Training Center partnered with the manufacturers to determine the equipment they needed for training and to develop a curriculum.

People are also reading...

- 1 **5 Buffalo cops placed on leave; Granville issued new citations as probe continues**
 - 2 **Bikers Against Child Abuse vice president accused of possessing, sharing child sex abuse material**
 - 3 **Lots of property is for sale around the new Bills stadium. But so far, developers aren't buying**
 - 4 **The Buffalo Bills have 3 draft picks in the first 2 rounds. It's a rare opportunity to hit it big**
-

Other coalition partners got involved. The Workforce Development Institute provided \$32,000 to purchase the equipment, including the microscopes that the technicians use. Northland obtained funding from Workforce Buffalo, equivalent to \$5,000 per student, to cover tuition and class supplies.

Four participating employers – Moog, Keller Technology, Casey Machine and T&T Legacy Metals – agreed to provide a stipend of \$2,000 for each student they intended to hire. A master finisher from Moog led the training, with assistance from another master finisher at the company.

Out of 60 applicants for the program, 10 students were selected and started their training in October. Nine of them completed the 12-week program. All of the graduates were hired by the participating employers. Moog hired six of them, with starting pay of \$22 per hour.

"This is just the first example of the capability of the coalition," said Tucker, who is also the coalition's executive director. Northland will offer the training program again in September, to meet manufacturers' ongoing need.

Jerry Irving, vice president of knowledge management at Moog, said the finishing and deburring training provided through Northland is an effective way to introduce new hires to the company.

"It's been a real win for us, because the people who came through the program came on the job with much higher skills and knowledge than we typically would have," Irving said.

Once they are working for Moog, he said, it is easier for them to move into other positions at the company. The master finishers who led the training are serving as mentors to the new hires who came through the program.

Moog, which is based in Elma, wants to recruit more workers from Buffalo, and Northland's program helps with that objective, Irving said. "We want a more diverse workforce. We want to provide opportunities for people who want to get ahead."



Moog's headquarters in Elma. (Derek Gee/News file photo)

Derek Gee, News file photo

The manufacturing and tech coalition received \$29 million in funding over three years from the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation and Empire State Development. Tucker said the coalition has built strong support among employers, training providers, pipeline developers and workforce development boards.

Among the coalition partners' initiatives:

- Per Scholas Buffalo recently graduated 20 students from the first class of its tech training program, and is teaching its second group of students. Per Scholas Buffalo has ambitions to increase the number of students it trains each year.
- The Buffalo Niagara Manufacturing Alliance has helped the "Dream It, Do It" program expand into Erie and Niagara counties. The program introduces young people to career opportunities in manufacturing, through building connections between schools and employers.
- Fresenius Kabi, which makes sterile, injectable drugs at its plant on Grand Island, had some of its employees go through a mechatronics training program at Northland to expand their skills. The vast majority of them have moved into higher-level positions, Tucker said.



Workers set up the production line in between batches at the Fresenius Kabi plant. (Derek Gee/News file photo)

Derek Gee, Buffalo News

The coalition has grown to 48 employer partners, including prominent companies such as M&T Bank, Moog, ACV Auctions and Cummins Inc.

Collaboration among the coalition's partners is the key to their work, Tucker said. He said he is confident that the job placement numbers spurred by the coalition's work will continue to grow.

"This is hard work, building coalitions, keeping coalitions together, demonstrating the impact," he said. "I think what I'm satisfied about is, this shows the potential if we work together."

Semiconductor supplier conference set

Local companies might be curious to know whether they could supply the semiconductor industry.

A day-and-a-half long conference planned for the University at Buffalo's North Campus this summer will cover that subject. **"Bridging the Gap: Activating the Semiconductor Supply Chain Network"** is scheduled for July 15 and 16.

Attendees will hear from leaders of the upstate tech hub and GO SEMI, the state's office focused on semiconductor development, said Jennifer Flagg, director of the Center for Supply Chain Analytics at the University at Buffalo's School of Management.

Companies that have made the pivot to serving the semiconductor industry will share their experiences. Helping companies make that pivot is the focus of the Supply Chain Activation Network, or SCAN, a component project of the tech hub, which UB is leading on behalf of Buffalo, Rochester and Syracuse.

About 100 firms across the three regions are currently serving the semiconductor industry, Flagg said. SCAN aims to boost that number to 200 firms by 2035.

Flagg said the July conference will help local companies learn what is involved with becoming a supplier to a company such as Micron Technology, which plans to build a massive chip fabrication complex near Syracuse, and help connect buyers and suppliers with each other.

Want to know more? Three stories to catch you up:

- **Northland revs up auto tech training**
 - **Moog earnings take off amid strong sales in space, defense and military aircraft**
 - **Prospectus: Fresenius Kabi's investments help make lifesaving drugs**
-

*Welcome to Buffalo Next. This newsletter from The Buffalo News will bring you the latest coverage on the changing Buffalo Niagara economy – from real estate to health care to startups. Read more at **BuffaloNext.com**.*
