Motlow State-Bridgestone partnership fulfilling need for highly skilled workers


Posted by Larry Flowers - email

LA VERGNE, TN (WSMV) –

It's a public-private partnership that's helping to train the next generation of highly skilled workers, and it didn't cost you the taxpayer one dime.

Motlow State Community College has partnered with Bridgestone and is now offering a degree in mechatronics.

Even some high school students are getting their first year of college out of the way, and a head start on their careers.

Terrance Payne has always liked taking things apart and putting them back together, so he quit his job as a certified nursing assistant, and is now training for his next career.

"I was at a loss and then I heard about this program, came in, and now my future looks endless," Payne said.

He's among the first class of 12 students in the new Motlow State Community College Bridgestone Mechatronics program.

"After I complete this program because of the opening of jobs it's pretty much guaranteed that I go out and work in the workforce," Payne said.

Bridgestone leaders said with 600,000 technical jobs in manufacturing alone, they decided to take a vision to train workers in mechatronics and make it a reality.

Mechatronics is a blend of electrical, mechanical and computerized technologies. Many industries including automotive, manufacturing, healthcare, and finance have a high demand for skilled workers.

The company footed the bill to startup the program at its LaVergne plant, with Motlow State providing the educational component.

Students can receive a certificate in Mechatronics Technology, or an Associate of Applied Science degree.

"We're making it where our students can get the training to get a job," said Mary Lou Apple, Motlow State president.

The students are not just in the classroom, they get hands-on experience using the latest technology.

"I think I'm one of the luckiest people in the world to be right here at the right time," student Jody Griffin said.

There is currently a mechatronics pilot program under way at Warren County High School in McMinnville. Oakland High will soon offer it as well.

"When they graduate from high school they'll not only received their high school diploma, they will also receive their Mechatronics certification," said Keith Hamilton, Bridgestone NA-MEC manager. "Basically they will already have completed their first year of college."

MTSU is trying to get on aboard as well. President Dr. Sidney McPhee will ask the State Board of Regents to allow the university to offer a degree in Design Engineering and Mechatronics.

"It will be first of its kind in the state," Apple said. "Students can begin in high school, go to a TTC (Tennessee Technology Center), a community college, a four-year university and achieve three different credentials, which will be recognized worldwide."

Several Rutherford County businesses have agreed to pay the tuition for the high school and college students to take the program.

State Sen. Bill Ketron said he will ask Gov. Bill Haslam to consider using this public-private mechatronics program model as a pilot for the rest of the state.

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