A public/private initiative has given Rutherford County a head start in developing a workforce with the skills needed to meet the growing demand for technical jobs in manufacturing and other sectors.

With support from tire company Bridgestone, Motlow State Community College and local high schools are creating new paths for students to receive certificates and associate degrees in mechatronics.

Mechatronics is a multidisciplinary process that fuses mechanical, electrical, and computer-assisted engineering to create technologies used in the design and manufacturing of a range of products.

The initiative’s goal is to educate skilled workers for manufacturing jobs that require technical knowledge even for the most basic positions.

“There is big demand for
Students prepare to obtain jobs in the mechatronics-related fields through training at Rutherford County schools and Motlow State Community College.
employees in all sectors, but especially for skilled technical workers,” says Paul Latture, president of the Rutherford County Chamber of Commerce.

**INDUSTRY INPUT**

The program was designed with industry input and includes training for Bridgestone workers at labs at the company’s La Vergne manufacturing plant.

In addition, a certificate program in mechatronics is being rolled out at Oakland High School in Murfreesboro, which will allow students to work on their associate degrees at Motlow. The program is based on a three-tier international certification program created by Siemens, a German engineering group, and it will begin with the class of 2014. Classes will be taught by Motlow instructors at Bridgestone, where a series of grants totalling more than $3.2 million purchased equipment and classroom space.

Also helping to prepare and educate the workforce, Middle Tennessee State University has plans to offer a bachelor’s program in the mechatronics field into which Motlow students would be able to transfer.

“There are multiple entries and exit points to the program based on what the students want,” says Fred Rascoe, director of career readiness at Motlow.

The program prepares students for jobs in the local marketplace. In addition, some companies are sending workers through the certificate program in order to prepare them to step into jobs in maintenance and other positions that require a greater level of technical know-how.

“Industries in Middle Tennessee asked us to come up with a program that met their needsTop to bottom: In cooperation with Motlow State Community College and Bridgestone, Murfreesboro’s Oakland High School is now offering a certificate program in mechatronics.; Rutherford County students attend classes and complete required coursework to obtain jobs in mechatronics-related fields.
because they were having problems filling jobs for trained skilled technicians,” Rascoe says. “The industries here have changed from manual labor-based operations to robotics and automation.”

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE
Bridgestone provided space for the program at its La Vergne plant, which allowed it to be up and running in about a year. Keith Hamilton, manager of the North America Manufacturing Education Center at Bridgestone, says that Bridgestone supported the program because of a shortage of skilled workers in the local community. In addition, the company is facing a large number of retirements in the coming years. Bridgestone wanted to educate current employees to be ready to take over those technical jobs while also developing local workers who are ready for the jobs of the future.

“Our first choice is to recruit locally, and by helping grow the workforce within the community, we think that down the road our ability to recruit in the community is going to be greatly improved,” Hamilton says.

The certificate programs at Motlow have been running for three years, and graduates have found jobs in the area, Rascoe says. In addition, many local companies contact the program’s leaders looking for top-notch intern candidates.

“They’ve had no problem obtaining employment if they didn’t have a job already,” he says.

What’s Online
Learn more about Rutherford County’s high-tech workforce at businessclimate.com/rutherford-county.

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