



# INDUSTRY ROUNDTABLE

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ATTORNEYS

## Developing WNY's workforce

CULTURE, ATTITUDES, EDUCATION PLAY SIGNIFICANT ROLES



JIM COURTNEY

Representatives of regional workforce development organizations and educators joined several employers to discuss the state of job training in Western New York. A recurring theme during the 90-minute discussion is the need for coordination among providers and employers.

BY DAN MINER  
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Western New York has a diversity of training programs targeting different groups of people and preparing them for open jobs at local employers.

They seek underemployed adults and Buffalo public school students. They span from Cheektowaga to Sanborn. And they involve everything from welding to cosmetology to nursing.

And yet, participants in a recent Business First Industry Roundtable that included training program leaders, college administrators and local employers said the system of training and placing people can be unwieldy and inefficient.

Simply put, it's hard to find the right person for the right program.

"We have businesses that have reached out to us looking for these individuals," said Patricia Reigle, Erie 1 BOCES workforce development supervisor. "I still think that there's a lot of folks out there that

still need to be trained. I think the awareness needs to keep being pushed forward."

BOCES workforce training programs are aimed at underemployed adults and include courses in nursing, CNC machining and welding and others.

Roundtable participants offered a variety of solutions, with a particular emphasis on publicizing the programs in a single place, possibly a website, so that potential registrants can see what's available.

Such a resource could also help the

many small- and mid-sized industrial companies whose biggest challenge is often finding skilled talent.

"So if I'm out in Arcade and I'm a manufacturer that wants to expand, but I'm not sure there's enough resources out there, is there a clearing house that I can go to?" said Frank Swiatek, interim executive director of the Canisius College Center for Professional Development. "Is there some resource where I can take a look at what's available and reduce my anxiety of expanding."

### ► BY THE NUMBERS

**550**

Average annual openings in region for construction trades workers

**10.6%**

Expected growth in WNY construction trades jobs from 2012 to 2020, to 22,140 total jobs

**7,400**

Number of private-sector jobs gained in Western New York during 2015

**1,650**

Projected number of WNY jobs for welders, cutters, solderers and brazers in 2022, a 7.1 percent increase from 2012

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## ► Let's talk about the workforce development challenges facing WNY.



### MARGARET PHILLIPS

Assistant professor and director, Paralegal Studies Program, Daemen College

From my perspective in terms of the challenges, the ability to write and read and problem solve. We're getting students from a variety of

backgrounds. Some are well prepared and some are first-generation college students. So to transition those students into appropriate professional behavior and give them the opportunity to develop their writing skills, and their problem solving skills and their reading skills, that's a challenge. Educating them with the appropriate technology is another one. And having the resources to do that.

### LORI MILLER

President, Development Professionals

One of the things that I see and one of the areas where I'm most needed in is in talent management.

We've got some great universities and colleges here, but as companies are evolving and having specific needs, there's a disconnect with having the right people to meet those needs and objectives. We've got these people coming out with specific degrees, technology. But the problem is when they get into these organizations, when they go from career development, they don't have the right leadership skills.



### LESTER LEOPOLD

Director, Adult and Continuing Education, Buffalo Public Schools Adult Education Division

We service about 1,500 refugees and immigrants a year at 28 sites throughout the city. The challenges are and the reason we are at 28 sites is because they can't get to us. They have day care issues. They don't know how to navigate the systems. And so we're like the foundation

## ► CLOSER LOOK AT THE ROUNDTABLE

The Workforce Development Industry Roundtable continues a series of discussions with Western New York business leaders.

Throughout the year, decision makers from diverse industries meet for a discussion moderated by Business First journalists.

Excerpts are published two weeks after the roundtable.

Upcoming topics include nonprofits, health care, food manufacturing, education, family business and tourism economy.

Roundtable discussions, sponsored by Hodgson Russ LLP, are held at the law firm's Pearl Street offices in Buffalo.

for them to get into college. We're a feeder for colleges. We're a feeder for post-secondary training. About 200 students a year earn a high school equivalency diploma through us. There's probably about 60,000 or more adults in Erie County over the age of 25 without a high school diploma and that doesn't take into consideration the under 25.



### FRANK SWIATEK

Interim executive director and executive-in-residence, Canisius Center for Professional Development

One of the challenges, I think, is small businesses and small business owners. They're looking to expand. But

they're afraid that the talent is not there. They're afraid that the workforce availability is not there. They're looking for manufacturing technicians. They're not sure, No. 1, of the availability or where to go. Somebody mentioned professionalism. We're noticing in the new hires, as an example, a lack of (professionalism). These are graduates from education schools. They're resigning by text message. They're coming to interviews with flip-flops and (Tim) Horton's coffee. They go to lunch. They don't come back. They go through the whole interview process, never show up and you never hear from them. Lack of respect on the job for people. So it's really an issue that we've been picking up lately - the whole issue of professionalism on the job.

### PATRICIA RIEGLE

Supervisor, Workforce Development Erie 1 BOCES

Some of our biggest challenges, especially with the needs of business and industry, are to have individuals coming into programs to start the training without needing some type of remedial work. Another disadvantage to a lot of these folks is that because they're long-term unemployed, there are supportive services that need to be paid to these people in order for them to be able

to come into the training and stay in the training. So many of these people have no resources. Their unemployment benefits have been exhausted, which then puts them at a disadvantage where they do not have dollars to provide transportation, child care, and those are some of the important pieces that someone needs to have in place in order to come to training and stay in the training.

### TOM LYNCH

President/CEO, Goodwill Industries of Western New York

The folks that we're working with, particularly those on public assistance, lack basic problem-solving skills. A lot of times they don't have a high school education.

They might have two or three kids. They might have an outstanding warrant. They might have a record. So they're coming to us at 22, 23 with these problems and their needs are complicated. You're not going to make, unless the governor has his way, \$15 an hour without some credentialed skill. But how do you do that if you don't have any money? How do you get to BOCES or Adult Tech? How do you do child care? So for us, it's trying to work with other agencies and education houses to put together really a comprehensive solution that has wrap-around supports. And it's not stuff that you can go to funders and say, gee, you know, how would you like to support somebody for five years to really make sure they get out of poverty as opposed to cutting a ribbon on a new building? And, you know, that's sort of the struggle, I think, workforce development agencies, especially like us that are working with entry-level folks, really face.

### MOLLIE BALLARO

Dean for admissions and workforce, Trocaire College

I see a couple challenges, sitting on my side of the desk. There are a lot of different types of students. Some of them are seeking a career for the first time and they're intimidated

in making an investment that they don't have a guarantee is going to land them a job. We also see a lot of people returning to school that we offer in Workforce Development, who either have job loss and are seeking a complete switch in their career, or are unfulfilled or unsatisfied, aren't moving up in the way that they wish to. And what I see as one of the bigger challenges, in fact ... we have to evolve the way we think of delivery. It's not just about associate and bachelor's degrees and master's degrees and so forth, but thinking about career training pathways.



### ROSANNE STEINMETZ

Owner and instructor, Quality PC Training

I think a lot of companies feel that you don't need computer classes these days. They figure, especially younger people that are just coming out of college and they know

Excel or they know Word and they know Outlook. But sometimes they don't. In computer training, there's an 80/20 rule that 80 percent of the users only know 20 percent of the product. And that's pretty much true. And so an average user will say, oh, I'm doing my e-mail. I'm getting my spreadsheets done, you know, I'm doing well. But they don't really. I don't think managers realize that their employees can be much more productive.

### PHYLLIS ULETT

Director of continuing education and workforce development, Niagara County Community College

Our challenges mirror what a lot of my colleagues have said here. A lot of the people that need training are lower income people, people that have been unemployed. So there is a huge funding issue. People simply cannot afford the programs. The only funding source that's available for prospective students that are available to the public is through (Re-employment and Eligibility Assessment). Funding is very limited and our programs, for instance, the funding is only





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for medical bill and coding. All the other programs there's actually no funding source. Students cannot use financial aid for non-credit (courses). Also with transportation. Most of our students, many of our students, low-income students are coming from Niagara Falls. Public transportation is very, very limited. Someone can come to school and they are there all day just waiting for a bus to get back home. Same types of things, supportive services that are needed just aren't available.

**STEVEN FINCH**

Plant manager, GM Powertrain-Tonawanda Engine Plant

I think the opportunities for workforce development in our environment abound. And the first thing, I guess, I would say is we've got a very mixed environment in our facility. We've got about 1,800 employees and amongst them are a large number of seasoned employees. And we struggle a lot with those employees being willing to take on what we would consider basic levels of technology. So, for instance, we want to implement a workplace of choice survey to all of our employees. This is the first time we've done it throughout the facility and we're really struggling because many of our

employees don't have their sign-on ID. Every employee has got one, but many of them haven't activated it and say "I don't need computers." We have a lot of people that don't really want to get into what they call new technology for us, which is just basically how you do business. Another issue is, from a workforce development standpoint, a lot of younger people coming out of school don't view manufacturing as an attractive place to work. They're not looking to come out and work in a factory. It's amazing because if any of you have been in the facility - once people get a chance to come into the building and really see what modern high-tech global manufacturing really looks like, it's a pretty exciting place. But there's still, I think, that image or perception of what manufacturing, even advanced manufacturing, you put the buzzwords on it, but there's still kind of that image and stigma. The last thing really piggybacks on the cost of training. We try to minimize the amount of manpower that's required to actually make the parts. And so when you're driven to a very lean structure, it's very difficult to break people away, to get them the ongoing training that they need.



**COURTNEY WALSH**

Assistant dean, Center for Executive Development, University at Buffalo School of Management

UB as a whole is focused on a couple things right now. Making sure that they not only have the academic

background, but that they've had the experience somehow in their field, whether it be in an internship or shadowing people so that they have a sense of what it's really like to be working in the job that they're going to be in. The No. 1 thing that people want in work is to make a difference and make progress. There's a recent study that asked employers to list the top five things that employers want and then they asked employees the same thing and the lists were completely backward. Employers listed making money, some kind of incentive or public reward. Far ahead of what was really No. 1 to employees, which was making progress and making a difference. In

Western New York, because we don't have a lot of corporate headquarters, that's probably the way we're going to be able to keep and retain people. So we spend a lot of time both in our credit programs and our noncredit programs getting people to think of their skills in different ways, so they can be used in organizations more broadly.



**RYAN HARTNETT**

Assistant vice president for academic affairs, Villa Maria College

The challenge of life issues hits us head-on every day working with our student population. Many of them coming from an urban environment.

Many of them without proper modeling, without models, not even a family member. They're first generation college students. They've had school lunches for years. They have had transportation that brought them to school and now they find



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themselves at college wondering, well, who's going to pay for my lunch? And so many of them they don't know what they've gotten into once they've come to us. So that challenge of life issue is huge. Getting people to schools, to programs, to training is also a major issue. Having the correct motivation. People don't know what they don't know. Well, they don't know that there are these training opportunities available that, in fact, there is a glut of manufacturing jobs here in Western New York. So there is a profound disconnect between the needs of the community of Western New York and the desires and wants of the individuals, particularly parents. Lastly, this issue of professionalism is a little bit more of a generational issue and the lack of skills in certain technologies. It is funny because the students have everything in the world at their fingertips on their cell phones, yet they can't write an appropriate e-mail to their professor.

**JOSEPH BENEDICT JR.**

Executive director, Construction Exchange of Buffalo & WNY

A lot of you mentioned issues with things that people should know after they graduate high school. In the construction industry, we see it big with math skills, things along those lines. Especially in construction as well, things like transportation. Something mostly unique to the construction industry is we don't work the same place every day. So you have to have a reliable mode of transportation to the construction site. And especially with the generational things, too. I think something that's magnified a little bit for our industry and is the same thing that Steve mentioned, is that there's a perception out there that the people that work in construction, work there because they couldn't go to college. They couldn't get the bachelor's degree. They couldn't get the associate degree. They couldn't do anything else, so they ended up in construction, and that's absolutely not true. There are such good careers in construction. You learn a trade and you can pretty much do whatever you'd like to do.

► **I want to follow up on something Steve said. As those skilled veteran employees retire, do you have a stream of talent coming in?**

**STEVEN FINCH**

GM Powertrain - Tonawanda Engine Plant

We employ a pretty intricate set of processes and systems in place. We have what's called a General Motors Global Manufacturing System. And I

believe that helps insulate us a little bit as we have changeover, as we have a change in skills and people come and go because those systems and processes are there to ensure that no matter who's manning the job, that we can get the job done according to the standard. What I am concerned about or afraid of are those other skilled jobs that require troubleshooting skills, problem solving. Someone mentioned that, those kinds of skills, that allow us to continue to stay on that forefront and the leading edge. I believe we'll be able to make good progress. That's not a concern. It's the how do you excel and be the best there is in the business and the most efficient. You still have to have a skillset, knowledge, and ability to be at that level of performance.

► **Do you do a lot of your training in-house?**

**STEVEN FINCH**

GM Powertrain - Tonawanda Engine Plant

We do a lot of our training in-house. We have a pretty extensive training staff. We have a training facility that has a lot of the things that are particular to our business and industry so that we can train people specifically for the skills and the talents that they need. And then the outside training that we do a lot of it, we engage (original equipment manufacturers) to come in and run a class for their particular piece of equipment on our floor. So it's kind of tailored to what we need. And then we do supplement that with other training that we get from some of the local institutions, things like that, but the majority of what we do is in-house.

► **Joe, the people coming to you, are you training them on exactly what needs to be done or are they coming to you with a skillset that is sound enough that you can put them right on a job site?**

**JOSEPH BENEDICT JR.**

Construction Exchange of Buffalo & WNY

It varies. Certainly it's harder, or there is more to learn, when you're becoming an electrician versus

a laborer. And certainly there's differences between union and nonunion companies. But there's always some level of hands-on training that goes with it and that's something that happens regardless.

► **Is there more work that needs to be done so that there's better alignment among the various players that are responsible for workplace development?**

**LORI MILLER**

Development Professionals

I would definitely say that, just academia and industry there definitely needs to be a better bridge. I'm also an adjunct professor at Buffalo State College and I teach Com 205. They go out there and they come to me all the time as a career coach. So I try to connect my students with my contacts within the private industry and there's definitely a disconnect with that. And also, from the recruiting sources from the industry side, they don't know where to get these talented people. So I'm always trying to be the bridge.

► **Lester, in the Buffalo public schools, do you feel like there is enough connectivity in higher ed to workforce development in the industry?**

**LESTER LEOPOLD**

Buffalo Public Schools

It can improve, there is no doubt about it. We think we have a large footprint in our community, but there's still people that haven't found us yet. And so that needs to improve all the

time. We have probably 80 partners within our community, within the region, that we connect with through e-mails letting them know what's going on in adult education, what the opportunities are. We also do workforce training. Most of our programs are filled. There's a lot of silos in Buffalo and everyone is very proprietary about what they do. We're servicing 7,000 adults a year. Their main goal is employment, to get into a career, to get training. So I'm always trying to connect with people. You know what we

find out in adult education? The majority of our students are not even familiar with the titles of jobs. The Department of Labor has a robust website and lists jobs in every county and emerging jobs and people don't realize that. So these are some of the things we are training our students on, so that they can find out for themselves how to go about finding a job. So there's all these programs out there that people just don't know about and where are they going to find out? They'll find out about it when they come to our program, but there is still a large disconnect in Buffalo.

**FRANK SWIATEK**

Canisius Center for Professional Development

We happen to be one of Les' partners. One of the things that the community is missing is really end-to-end coordination. So what are we going to do with the 50 percent of the kids in the Buffalo public school system that don't graduate? (Say Yes to Education Buffalo) is awesome, but everybody is not going to college. We need the equivalent of a Say No. You mentioned it about how it's not cool to go into manufacturing. It's not cool to go into construction. Not cool to have these jobs, that oh, by the way, pay a heck of a lot more than a liberal arts graduate is going to get when they come out. But what do we do with kids that don't graduate? How do you get them all the way through to a \$15 an hour job? How do I get them to even understand what the options are? Career exploration is huge for us. There's such a need for this end-to-end coordination that is going to benefit the community because we're going to get more workers that are going to be available to go work for Steve or go work in construction or go work in whatever.

**LESTER LEOPOLD**

Buffalo Public Schools

I think a lot of people don't realize that Buffalo schools have some great career training programs. We have construction trades training going on at night, plumbing, residential wiring.

**MOLLIE BALLARO**

Trocaire College

One of the issues that I see where there's a disconnect is the professionalism and workplace etiquette are oftentimes left to career services offices on college campuses and only a small number of students ever utilize those services. They come, they get great services. If they don't come, they don't know about anything. I feel those types of things are what elevates employees to those levels of leadership and management



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and they really should be taught in the classroom as part of the curriculum.

**COURTNEY WALSH**

UB School of Management

Have the programs available for people easily in high school, if not before. I mean, you see the Charter School for Applied Technology exposing kids to all kinds of wonderful jobs at an early age, to give them an idea of what's out there. But beyond even having those programs for people, teaching young people all the way through college and graduate school that they're in charge of their own career.

**RYAN HARTNETT**

Villa Maria College

I would like to talk about some of the successes we've had in bridging. We have professors teaching courses at Buffalo Center for Arts and Technology down there right now. So students go there for the after program and they're getting excited about college. They're getting excited about college. They are meeting a professor. We invite them on the campus. They do those kinds of things and then they get excited about what they're doing. That kind of bridging, I think, is really what's important.

► **Businesses tell us that they have job openings, but they can't fill the positions. What's creating that situation?**

**PATRICIA RIEGLE**

Workforce Development Erie 1 BOCES

I don't think there's enough people trained currently to fill a lot of these positions. I know at Erie 1 we don't have an issue placing people that have successfully completed one of our adult career and tech ed programs. We're training people right now in welding, CNC machining. We have a program called electromechanical maintenance and those are the individuals that maintain industrial equipment. And we're not finding any issues placing these people in jobs, entry level jobs. We have businesses that have reached out to us looking for these individuals. I still think that there's a lot of folks out there that still need to be trained. I think the awareness needs to keep being pushed forward. Look at all the press that SolarCity got. It really brought that awareness out that there's a lot of good jobs in manufacturing. I've attended several of the informational sessions for Solar City and one that I was at I was amazed. There was probably 300 people that came into this forum to

hear about those jobs. I was really taken aback at how unaware they were of positions in industry in the Buffalo area and what's out there.

► **Has SolarCity reached out to any of you and said, hey, this is what we need?**

**PATRICIA RIEGLE**

Workforce Development Erie 1 BOCES

About the last six months we've been doing testing for them. We've been administrating the test of adult basic education. And what that does is that gives them a baseline

grade level math and reading level. So twice a week, we will have folks that will come in that are interested in taking positions at SolarCity. Most of them, the vast majority of them, have manufacturing experience. I've only had one meeting with an individual from SolarCity and they're interested in our industrial electricity students. So it's more of the skilled trade that they're looking at us for.

**COURTNEY WALSH**

UB School of Management

We have had some discussions with them. The dean of our School of Engineering along with our Department of Supply Chain Management out of the School of Management have met with them about some of the management needs on top of the technical needs for some of their management positions. And some memorandums of understanding have been drafted, but I think that's in the early stages.

**LESTER LEOPOLD**

Buffalo Public Schools

I think they're being aggressive in their hiring. They're looking at our steam engineering technology class, to hire possibly anywhere from 10 to 70 of our former students. So they're looking at our graduates that are presently in the industry.

**TOM LYNCH**

Goodwill Industries of Western New York

I think to Patty's point, the SolarCity jobs are certainly a boost to the community, but just getting the conversation going that this is a good career path. That you can make some good money starting out

and whether it's with SolarCity or whoever SolarCity takes the people from. I think the awareness is raising that this is a good alternative career path if you're not necessarily inclined to be on the college path.

► **Do you think that the situation is a little bit different as far as the awareness of potential consumers or people who might end up being a nurse?**

**MOLLIE BALLARO**

Trocaire College

I do. I think people who are already within health care certainly have a very good understanding of what they can do. I think similar to saying there's jobs in manufacturing, telling high school students

there's jobs in health care. I think we have to lead them to the water, so to speak. And I think that being a nurse or a doctor is not the only avenue that they can take. I think that there's education that needs to take place on the side of people who aren't as familiar with health care to know that those are opportunities out there.

**MARGARET PHILLIPS**

Daemen College

That's maybe where we get back to the media. It seems like we're talking about bridges and conversations, and a lack of knowledge. And in terms of building the bridges, I think academia is very much trying to create those partnerships. We can have something where we can walk in and for those students that fail out of my paralegal studies degree, I can say you can work in Buffalo as a construction worker and there's value in that.

**JOSEPH BENEDICT JR.**

Construction Exchange of Buffalo &amp; WNY

Not to jump in, but what you just said I think is the part of the stigma for construction. The people that failed out of your program.

► **So choosing a manufacturing career path, how much do you make as an entry level construction worker?**

**JOSEPH BENEDICT JR.**

Construction Exchange of Buffalo &amp; WNY

Most of the (union) trades have four or five years apprentice programs that probably start in the \$15 per hour range. There is also health benefits and pension benefits and some other

things. But some of them, you can be at the end of five years journeymen making \$55 an hour. Then you put in overtime. A lot of these guys in five years are making \$80,000 plus.

► **How much is a graduate of one of your CNC machinery programs make?**

**PATRICIA RIEGLE**

Workforce Development Erie 1 BOCES

They are taking an entry level position and they are walking out the door making anywhere from \$14 to \$16 an hour. After 90 days, after a couple years, their wages could double.

► **Steve, what are your salaries?**

**STEVEN FINCH**

GM Powertrain - Tonawanda Engine Plant

A full-time worker, once they are at max scale is about \$28 an hour, not including benefits, just salary.

**FRANK SWIATEK**

Canisius Center for Professional Development

A lot of communities have workplace development models. But, you know what I don't even know if a workplace development model exists for Western New York, but it would contain the kinds of things that we're talking about. As an example, changing the image of the trades, changing the image of manufacturing could be part of it. We participated in the Jobsapalooza last week. I mean, there were 90 businesses there looking for people to hire, 90. Again, what's preventing them from hiring? What are the lack of skills? Is it a mindset issue? Is it a skills issue? Is it a behavioral issue? Is it a life skill issue? What's preventing them from hiring? So, the opportunity I think is here, in terms of what's happening in Western New York and I think that's very, very powerful.