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Community and technical colleges form alliance for composites industry

OLYMPIA, Wash. – From aircraft to boats and wind turbines to sporting goods, Washington’s rapidly growing composites industry is creating new jobs that require skilled technicians. Now an alliance of community and technical colleges called “Composites Washington” has formed to strengthen workforce skills throughout the industry.

The group is made up of community and technical colleges that offer composites training and is led by two Washington State Centers of Excellence: Aerospace and Advanced Materials Manufacturing at Everett Community College, and Marine Manufacturing and Technology at Skagit Valley College. The centers work with community and technical colleges across the state to share curriculum, align education with industry training needs and develop partnerships to support jobs and economic growth.

Participating colleges include Clover Park Technical College, Edmonds Community College, Everett Community College, Olympic College, Peninsula College, Skagit Valley College, Spokane Community College, and South Seattle Community College.

Mary Kaye Bredeson, executive director of the Center of Excellence for Aerospace and Advanced Manufacturing, said the alliance was formed to fill an urgent need for qualified composite material technicians in an ever-growing number of industries.

“We knew the timing was perfect to establish this group,” she said. “More than 100 Washington companies are already engaged in composites manufacturing, fabrication, repair and advanced materials research and development. We’re working to keep them strong and competitive and attract new industries to our state.”

While composites have long been tied to the marine and aerospace industries, the evolution of composite technology is also creating opportunities for companies that build other products or supply the tools and materials needed to make them. One of those firms is Janicki Industries in Sedro-Woolley, which designs and builds high-precision tooling for aerospace, marine, wind energy and transportation customers.

“We appreciate the efforts of groups like Composites Washington. A better trained workforce benefits all of us and helps us maintain our competitive advantage here in Washington,” said Tom Doughty, company vice president of administration.

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His views were shared by Wes Fridell, human resources and safety manager for New World Yacht Builders, an Anacortes-based company that makes custom high-end composite yachts and commercial vessels.

“The need for the alliance is great. We have benefitted – and will continue to benefit into the future – from a trained composites workforce,” he said. “Having the resources locally to train work-ready employees strengthens not only our company but the marine industry and local economy as well.”

Colleges already teamed up earlier this year to train and certify instructors to teach the latest composites technology. Training was provided by Abaris, the company that trains FAA safety inspectors in advanced composite maintenance and repair.

“The strength of the alliance is the diversity of industry focus and the commitment to standards-based training embraced by each college, and the professional development opportunities we are bringing in for faculty, students and industry partners,” said Ann Avary, director of the Center of Excellence for Marine Manufacturing and Technology.

Composites Washington plans to host a professional development workshop for faculty this winter and a faculty-industry workshop in the spring with the American Composites Manufacturers Association (ACMA), one of the largest industry trade groups in the world.

Composites Washington has showcased Washington at global trade shows in Paris and Boston organized by the JEC Group, one of the largest organizations exclusively dedicated to the composites industry, and will attend two other international trade shows: SAMPE Tech June 3-4 in Seattle and the Composites and Advanced Materials Expo Oct. 13-16 in Orlando.

Composites Washington is launching a website that will feature education and training opportunities along with industry trends and data.

Composites are used in a myriad of industries, including aerospace, marine, automotive, medical devices, energy, construction, sporting equipment and consumer goods. Boeing 777X wings will be made of carbon fiber composite material.

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About the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges:

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges is led by a Governor-appointed board and provides leadership, advocacy, and coordination for Washington’s system of 34 public community and technical colleges. Each year, nearly 400,000 students train for the workforce, prepare to transfer to a university, gain basic math and English skills, or pursue continuing education. Visit our website at SBCTC.edu.

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