

KY Federation of Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME)

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During the Spring of 2014, GE Appliances (GEA) declared a crisis with its ability to recruit and hire qualified hourly manufacturing associates at its headquarters location in Louisville, KY. Historically, when GE Appliances posted for openings for manufacturing positions thousands of residents in the greater Louisville area would apply for these sought-after positions. The volume of interested candidates applying for openings would exceed the openings available resulting in GEA suspending the intake of applications. This was no longer the case in 2014 and it was clear that the candidates who did applied for openings had little to no requisite experience in manufacturing.

GEA reached out to other manufacturers in the Louisville area who also were experiencing a significant challenge in hiring qualified personnel for their openings as well. GEA held a meeting in April 2014 at its Manufacturing Training Center to discuss the shared concern and identify actions to improve the number of qualified candidates for hourly manufacturing positions.

The Louisville manufacturers recognized that years of outsourcing of manufacturing positions, an increase in distribution and logistics roles, and the overall diversification of the U.S economy had put pressure on the manufacturing sector. This was especially significant in manufacturing roles that needed to interface with technology or maintenance roles to diagnose and fix manufacturing equipment. The Louisville manufacturers all agreed that they needed to work together to improve the workforce development activities to increase the pipeline of qualified candidates seeking positions in manufacturing.

The Louisville Manufacturing Blueprint to Improve the Workforce Skills Gap

The outcome of the manufacturers meeting held at GEA was the creation of “A Blueprint for the Bridging the Industrial Skills Gap.” This blueprint was the result of the actions the manufacturers felt needed to be collectively undertaken by all manufacturing employers in Louisville. There was the recognition that these actions would require a sustained commitment over many years to make the impact required to develop future candidates for manufacturing positions. The immediate actions agreed to included, the creation of a Louisville KY Federation of Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME) Chapter, engagement with public schools to expand awareness of manufacturing positions, and support Kentucky Association of Manufacturers (KAM) efforts to promote manufacturing careers.

Creation of a Louisville KY FAME Chapter

A representative from Toyota joined the April 2014 meeting of Louisville manufacturers to discuss their success using a FAME model to develop future employees at Toyota. It was clear the FAME model could be replicated by other manufacturers in other communities and was quickly agreed upon to be one of the actions coming out of the April 2014 meeting.

The FAME model allows sponsoring manufacturing employers to hire employees to work at the manufacturer for three days while allowing the employee to attend a local educational partner two days per week. In two years, the employee student earns an associate’s degree in advanced manufacturing technology while gaining two years of work experience. The 70 hours of college credit earned over the

two years of study allows the employee to transfer to a four-year college and pursue a bachelor's degree should they desire to do this in the future.

The Louisville manufacturers worked together to identify an educational partner to complete the academic portion of the FAME requirement. Similar to the Toyota experience, the Louisville manufacturers felt the local community and technical college was the best partner to achieve the degree program. The Jefferson Community & Technical College (JCTC) was eager to partner with the sponsoring FAME companies and quickly implemented an advanced manufacturing technology curriculum.

The JCTC partnership has been very positive and has helped position the community college as a leader in workforce development in the Louisville community. The college has been accommodating with the needs of the sponsoring companies while highlighted its role as an educational institution prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The success of the FAME program convinced JCTC to embark on a path to build a new Advanced Manufacturing & Information Technology facility on its downtown Louisville campus. The new facility will be opened for the Fall 2020 semester and allow the community college to meet the increased needs to provide technical education to its students.

The sponsoring companies recruit at local high school for graduating seniors interested in careers in manufacturing. ACT scores coupled with a demonstrated desire to seek a career in manufacturing help to screen the most qualified graduating seniors in local high schools.

The Louisville KY FAME Chapter started its first FAME class in 2015 with ten sponsored students and quickly doubled the FAME participation to 22 in 2016 and 30+ in 2017. It is expected the annual class participation will likely be in the 40-50 range for the foreseeable future.