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Secretary Gassman Announces Grow Grant, Training in Advanced Manufacturing for Nearly 130 Workers at Three Appleton Area Firms

During stop at Fox Valley Tech Robotics Center, Labor Secretary highlights Governor Doyle's Grow Wisconsin plan to ensure first-rate workforce, compete at high end

APPLETON – Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Roberta Gassman today announced an Emerging Industries Skills Partnership grant of \$85,000 to the Fox Valley Workforce Development Board, Inc., to train nearly 130 workers in the maintenance and operation of robotics equipment at three manufacturers in the region.

Governor Doyle made the Emerging Industry Skills Partnership part of his **Grow Wisconsin – The Next Steps** strategy for economic and workforce development. The grant that Secretary Gassman announced on his behalf will leverage \$65,000 in additional funding, federal money plus contributions from the three firms to help cover the training costs.

“In today’s tough global economy, the successful manufacturers are lean and efficient, and the workforce training initiative we are launching today will help our manufacturers and their workers become more lean and efficient in producing goods and services known for quality the world over,” Secretary Gassman said. “With this grant, our partners will train up to 127 workers – maintenance engineers, machine operators, and technicians– to service robotic equipment, reduce costs and grow their businesses. These are good, high end jobs of the future in advanced manufacturing.”

The grant is one of 10 being awarded under the Governor Doyle’s Emerging Industries Skills Partnership initiative, a total of \$850,000 to provide new and incumbent workers with the necessary skills and meet workforce demands in advanced manufacturing, biotechnology and renewable energy.

Secretary Gassman announced the grant at the Robotics Technology Center of the Fox Valley Technical College. The Fox Valley Workforce Development Board and the college will provide training at the center and a new FVTC facility in Waupaca. Joining her were representatives of Coating Excellence International, Wrightstown; ThyssenKrupp Waupaca, Inc., Waupaca; and Walker Forge, Inc., Clintonville.

As outlined by Secretary Gassman, the grant will fund robotics training as follows:

- Coating Excellence, up to 16 workers, as it prepares to expand production of extrusion coated and laminated products for a wide variety of markets, including food packaging and industrial markets.
- ThyssenKrupp Waupaca, up to 75 workers. Robotic equipment maintenance is now outsourced at great expense. With its workers trained to service the equipment, the firm can cut costs.
- Walker Forge, up to 36 workers. The firm now sends workers out of state for training. Training locally will ensure skilled personnel to maintain the equipment, keep production on schedule and grow the business.

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Accepting the grant from Secretary Gassman were Al Hesse, Chief Operating Officer for the Fox Valley Workforce Development Board and Dr. Susan May, Executive Vice President and Chief Academic Officer for the Fox Valley Technical College.

Coating Excellence International President Michael Nowak described the training as crucial to competing successfully against foreign companies.

“As CEI has grown and increased its production efficiency to meet threats from foreign competition, our equipment has become more automated and sophisticated,” Nowak said in a letter supporting the project. “Along with this sophistication comes a need for advanced manufacturing skills in CEI’s maintenance workforce to install, program, and maintain the equipment. ... Without this advanced manufacturing training, CEI will be limited in its future ability to meet these low-labor cost foreign threats through improved efficiency. Without this ability CEI will not be able to continue expanding.”

Deborah Smith, Manager of Organization Development at ThyssenKrupp Waupaca, said the training would take the company to the next level. In support of the project, she said, “Robotics training is essential for us to meet our business goals and is integral in the strategic plan for our company.”