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Secretary Gassman Highlights Grow Project, Helping Fox Valley Firms Train Workers to Compete at High End in Advanced Manufacturing

Custom Marine among Labor Secretary's stops during Workforce Development Month

NEENAH – In a visit today at Custom Marine, Inc., Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Roberta Gassman met workers benefiting from Governor Doyle's strategic investments in training, allowing manufacturers like Custom Marine to compete at the high end and succeed in today's global economy.

"Our skilled workers are known the world over for goods and services of the very best quality, and it's crucial that we maintain that competitive edge," Secretary Gassman said. "Here in the Fox Valley, workers at Custom Marine and other manufacturers are learning new skills in advanced manufacturing, training that is being funded by one of Governor Doyle's Grow Wisconsin grants. This is exactly the sort of investment we must make to keep Wisconsin's economy growing, even as the national economy falters."

Earlier this year, Secretary Gassman announced an Emerging Industries Skills Partnership grant of \$85,000 to the Fox Valley Workforce Development Board, Inc. to train 127 workers in the maintenance and operation of robotics equipment at three manufacturers in the region. Since then, Custom Marine enrolled in the program and selected nine workers for training at Fox Valley Technical College. Previously, the four manufacturers had to send their workers to Michigan for robotics training.

Governor Doyle launched the Emerging Industry Skills Partnership with his *Grow Wisconsin – The Next Steps* plan. The Fox Valley grant was one of ten totaling \$850,000 to provide new and incumbent workers with training in advanced manufacturing, biotechnology and renewable energy.

At Custom Marine, Secretary Gassman met workers from the other companies also benefiting from the training. Her visit was one in a series of events the month of September, which Governor Doyle has proclaimed Workforce Development month. The other firms are Coating Excellence International, Wrightstown; ThyssenKrupp Waupaca, Inc., Waupaca; and Walker Forge, Inc., Clintonville.

Custom Marine is an industry-leading manufacturer and global distributor of exhaust headers, systems and components for recreational and high-performance boats. In the fall of 2006, Custom Marine moved into a new \$5 million facility, combining corporate headquarters and manufacturing operations at one location.

Representative Gordon Hintz of Oshkosh joined Secretary Gassman for the Custom Marine tour and a visit later to Marvel Manufacturing Company, Inc., in Oshkosh. In February, Governor Doyle announced \$250,000 in Technology Zone tax credits to help Marvel Manufacturing expand and add more than \$2 million in equipment. The global manufacturer of industrial band saws will add nearly 50 jobs.

"Formed just four years ago, Marvel Manufacturing is expanding, adding jobs and partnering with Fox Valley Technical College to train skilled machinists," Secretary Gassman said. "The company is setting an example for others by sending its workers to school, paying their tuition and giving them a wage increase for every class they successfully complete. Like Governor Doyle, Marvel Manufacturing's executives know we must investment in people to ensure a skilled workforce and a growing economy."