

Barrington manufacturer's \$1.3-million donation to ECC includes machinery, software, training

By Rafael Guerrero chicagotribune.com



Workers remove via forklift the seven-axis Swiss CNC machines donated to Elgin Community College.

Elgin Community College's industrial manufacturing program will receive a boost this summer will include summer training, software installation, and associated equipment.

The partnership between Swiss Automation and ECC aims to continue the growth and attraction of the college's manufacturing offerings to match projected job growth in the national and regional manufacturing industry over the next decade.

"We need more manufacturing jobs in the U.S. This is what built our country," said Marc Moran, vice president of operations for Swiss Automation. "I think it's really important we help."

ECC officials and educators Wednesday felt blessed with the donation. It would have taken ECC years to save for such a purchase.

"They took care of all of this," said Cathy Taylor, ECC's dean of sustainability, business and career technologies. "We just needed to find the space for the machine."

CNC machines like the one donated to ECC are a far cry from the oily and dirty perception the general public has about machinery, said Umberto Tinajero, computer integrated manufacturing instructor and instructional coordinator at ECC. The manufacturing on a CNC machine is automated, computer programmed, and precise down to one-tenth of an inch.

"These machines can do anything. They can do parts for NASA, for medicine, for the military, firearms, and hydraulics industries," said Tinajero.



A 12-foot bar feeder is moved into Elgin Community College's manufacturing lab on Wednesday.

The manufacturer donated a similar CNC machine to Cary-Grove High School last year, but that donation is smaller in comparison, said Moran. ECC becomes the only college in the area with a Swiss CNC machine, he said. Swiss Automation considered other community colleges in the suburbs for the donation but ultimately chose ECC.

As part of the donation, ECC instructors will get one-week training to better understand the machine and its capabilities, said Moran. The ECC program will also get software associated with the machine.

"This also positions ECC as a training facility," Moran added, noting workers outside the college can come in and train on the equipment.

ECC plans to introduce a new CNC advanced programming certification program in the fall, said Taylor. Donations like the one this summer will help make the program more attractive, she said.

Certification in CNC advanced programming can help fill engineer manufacturing jobs, which are expected to grow by 9% through 2026. Taylor said the job pays well, too, noting median salaries can pay \$40 an hour or more.

Local manufacturers like Swiss Automation see the need for more skilled workers, especially as baby boomers retire. Both Moran and human resources manager Donalle Zemanek said the company hired 70 new employees last year. "We need more," she said.

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