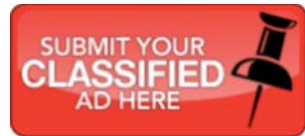




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Skilled labor tops list of employers' needs

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Jim Hannon/TimesDaily

Posted: Thursday, July 25, 2013 12:02 am | Updated: 10:16 pm, Thu Jul 25, 2013.

By Tom Smith
Senior Staff Writer

Adam Patterson said when he graduated high school he had a long talk with his father about his future.

"Some people have college degrees and can't get a job in their field," Patterson, 19, said. "My dad is an electrician with TVA, and I talked with him about going into some kind of trade.

"I decided on the maintenance field because it covers such a wide range of things — from electrical to welding to mechanics."

Patterson is enrolled at Northwest-Shoals Community College and is scheduled to graduate next summer.

"This is a growing field, something I can grow with," Patterson said.

Roger Garner, instructor for the Industrial Systems program at Northwest-Shoals, said more companies are looking for skilled laborers.

"We have about 40 students in our class right now, and 100 percent are already working at companies before they get through the program," Garner said. "There is a tremendous demand for this kind of skilled labor in the job market right now."

Garner's assessment is in line with a recent study published in Forbes.com that found skill labor positions are the hardest to fill in the U.S. The study shows there is a need for skilled trades such as carpenters,

Labor skills

Northwest-Shoals Community College student Wesley South and instructor Roger Garner discuss the operation of a Festo automated manufacturing unit in the Industrial Systems program at the Muscle Shoals campus.

plumbers and electricians.

"And the maintenance field covers all of those," said Tony Riley, 50, a student at Northwest-Shoals. "I've been a boilermaker and a car salesman, but I decided I needed to do something different. I got into maintenance because it covers such a wide variety of trades."

Bill Lyons, owner of Lyons HR, in Decatur and Florence, said with all of the new industry either locating in the

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Shoals or expanding their already existing business here, skilled laborers are going to be in demand.

"We see it now more than we have in the past," Lyons said. "And there is going to be a shortage of skilled labor if we don't do more to educate our workforce and the workforces in the future."

Forest Wright, executive director of the Shoals Economic Development Authority, said the skills a person has directly relates to their earning potential.

"For an individual, the more skilled, the more likely that person is to have the quality of life that they want to achieve," Wright said. "While skills are clearly an important component, workplace ethics and the ability and desire to achieve are equally important in the workplace.

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Online Poll

Are you waiting on the tax-free weekend to shop for back-to-school items?

- Yes
- No

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Events Calendar

Monday, Jul 29, 2013 [see all events](#)

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
29	30	31	1	2	3	4

"Mostly Blues" exhibit
Kennedy Douglass Center for The Arts
9:00 am - 4:00 pm

Florence Rotary Club
Marriott Shoals Conference Center
12:00 pm

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"Simply because a person is unskilled in today's market does not permanently penalize them, but what does penalize them is to be unskilled and lack the desire to be skilled.

"A lot of companies will provide training, but the employee has to bring a good work attitude, desire to be successful and the ability to stay drug free."

Garner said it's as simple as supply and demand.

"Right now, the demand is for skilled laborers. We have companies begging for people with skills," he said.

Some of the hardest jobs to fill, according to the survey, include sales representatives, drivers, information technology workers, engineers, medical technicians, mechanics, teachers, accounting or finance workers and management executives.

"One thing all of those have in common, they require a special skill," said Jessica Sanderson, of Lyons HR. "Not everyone can do those jobs; they require knowledge and skill in those areas."

Shane Staggs, owner of Bevis Alignment in Florence that does mechanical work, said it's hard to find skilled mechanics.

"And that's because the work has gotten so technical," Staggs said. "Most young people who have the training aren't going to just work on cars, they're going to work on airplanes or at NASA.

"It used to be mechanics didn't have to have a lot of education. Not any more. Mechanic work is getting so complicated that you have to have training, and trained mechanics are hard to come by."

Lyons said there always is going to be a need for skilled laborers, but some young people don't always look at a trade in the same light as other professions.

"When I was in high school in the late 1970s, we had trade school or college prep," Lyons said. "One of the problems is the decision of a young person to go the trade route has sometime not been looked at in the same light as someone going to college."

Garner said if someone is skilled at whatever kind of job, there is a market for them.

"It's all about making yourself marketable for the jobs that are out there, and right now those are ones with specific skills," he said. "Whether it's welding, computers or electrical. This country is about manufacturing. You have to manufacture goods. It's that simple.

"I think we have realized that and realized that we did not prepare for that need for years.

"Now we are, and we are going to have to continue to prepare to fill the job market needs."

Tom Smith can be reached at 256-740-5757 or tom.smith@TimesDaily.com.

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