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NORTH COAST MARINE MANUFACTURING ALLIANCE FORMED

GREEN BAY, Wis. - While shipbuilding has taken a spotlight in front page news this past week as the U.S. Navy announced plans, pending Congressional approval, for 20 Littoral Combat Ships to be produced by Marinette Marine Corporation and Austal USA, much has been going on behind the scenes leading up to and preparing the shipbuilding industry not only for that important contract, but for a strong and growing regional marine manufacturing presence in Northeast Wisconsin.

The North Coast Marine Manufacturing Alliance, a regional shipbuilding industry sector partnership involving seven marine manufacturers and three higher educational institutions, was launched this fall to recognize and highlight Northeast Wisconsin as a premier place to purchase a ship, yacht, or boat.

In September 2010, ACE Marine LLC, Bay Shipbuilding Corporation, Burger Boat Company, Cruiser Yachts, Marinette Marine Corporation, Marquis Yachts, and Palmer Johnson joined together with Lakeshore Technical College, Northeast Wisconsin Technical College and University of Wisconsin - Marinette to form the partnership.

The purpose of the North Coast Marine Manufacturing Alliance is to convene ship/yacht/boat manufacturers to work in partnership with workforce development, educational institutions, economic development and labor. Through collaboration, Alliance members hope to highlight industry opportunity and further enhance the highly skilled workforce in marine manufacturing in our region as well as to promote best practices that improve regional marine manufacturing efficiency.

The need for more training regionally in the area of shipbuilding was first recognized in 2006 when UW-Marquette teamed up with Marinette Marine as well as fifteen other shipbuilders and design agents nationally and the University of South Alabama to pursue federal funding to develop and offer shipbuilding design courses both locally and online to serve the entire industry. Through grants funded in 2007 and 2008, UW-Marquette developed and has been delivering six distinct marine design courses uniquely tailored to industry need.

In August of 2009, Northeast Wisconsin Technical College met with marine manufacturing companies in northeast Wisconsin to discuss the industry's skill-set needs in order to develop additional curricula, which together with UW-Marquette's design courses, they plan to incorporate into new programs including a Marine Engineering Technology associate degree and a Marine Construction Technical Diploma. Further, through the American Boat and Yacht Council, Lakeshore Technical College is now offering marine electrical certification.

The need to form a sector partnership, and the opportunities for collaboration and the sharing of resources, became apparent based on these various independent responses to the need for training and our region's reflection of the national marine manufacturing industry's challenge with developing skilled workers.

The skill base of the U.S. shipbuilding industry is eroding, notably for welders, pipe fitters and ship fitters. Shipyards have also cited shortages of machinists, electricians and marine engineers. (U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of Export Administration's "National Security Assessment of the US Shipbuilding and Repair Industry", May 2001). Another report found, "Over 80% of respondents reported they do not believe they will have sufficient production workers in the next 5 years; and 95% anticipate a significant or moderate problem in meeting demand for new workers over the next 3-5years and beyond (NSRP/ASE Crosscut Initiatives Panel Project 2005).

One of the reasons for the labor shortage is an aging workforce. About 60% of respondents report the average age of their workforce is between 45 and 55; about 35% report that their workforce is between 35 and 45 (NSRP/ASE Crosscut Initiatives Panel Project 2005).

Wisconsin currently has 32 shipbuilding/yacht/boat companies and 6,600 individuals employed directly in the marine manufacturing industry. Northeast Wisconsin is located on 300 miles of ocean-going navigable waters with six ocean going ports. This easy access to ocean going ports has given this region a concentration of ship/yacht builders.

The seven marine manufacturers in northeast Wisconsin have a significant impact on the region's economy and labor force. Working in partnership with these companies and aligning their current and future needs directly impacts how the region can prosper by supporting this vital industry sector. Representing over 2200 employees total already, about a third of the entire Wisconsin marine industry, the North Coast Marine Manufacturing Alliance workforce is expected only to continue to grow.



With the anticipated growth of the industry, the need for marine design and manufacturing education is paramount. The Alliance recognizes the need to attract, develop and retain a workforce sufficient to meet current and future industry requirements. An Alliance website is currently under construction. In the meantime, to access information on current course offerings, contact Sharon Huntley at UW-Marquette at 715-735-4343, Bob Egger at NWTC at 920-498-6302, or Mike Thompson at LTC at 920-693-1238.

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