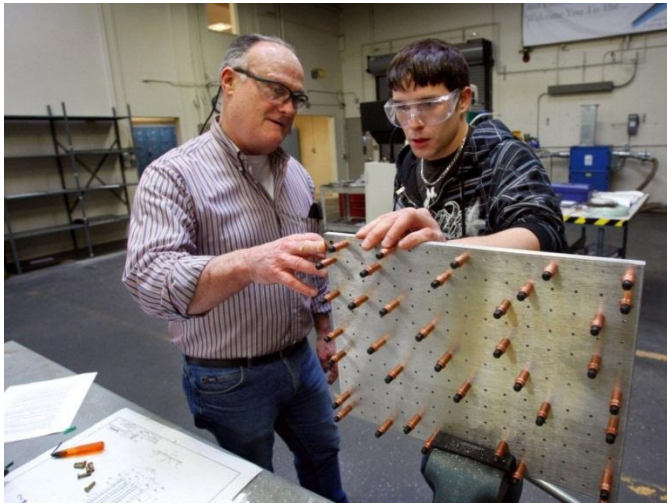


Published: Sunday, March 25, 2012

Paine Field training center is a model for success



Michael O'Leary / Herald file

Washington Aerospace Training and Research Center instructor Chris Meade works with student Anthony Olson on a drilling assignment in April 2011. The center offers 12-week training that starts online.

By **Michelle Dunlop**, Herald Writer

It's the little center that could.

When the [Washington Aerospace Training and Research Center](#) at Paine Field was initially announced in the [summer of 2009](#), it had the makings of an unfunded, unscripted mess.

The Legislature didn't fund aerospace training that year.

Boeing had just been through layoffs.

And the asbestos-choked building, on "loan" from Snohomish County, sorely needed renovation before it could be used.

But then the governor found discretionary funds to steer the center's way. And the federal government, at the behest of Washington's animated Congressional delegation, coughed up some money. Cue industry, with donations from Boeing and other companies.

Fast forward to 2012.

The center, often referred to by the acronym WATR, has been successful not only in graduate placement rate but also in collaboration among all levels of government, education and industry.

Since opening in June 2010, about 76 percent of the center's graduates who have interviewed for aerospace jobs have found them.

Larry Cluphf, director of the center, noted that it typically takes students a few months after graduating to go through the process of getting hired.

The center offers 12-week training that starts online, bringing students up to speed on manufacturing basics. The last eight weeks are half online, half in the classroom. Students pick a specialty: assembly mechanic or electrical assembler.

Two new specialties -- quality assurance and manufacturing tooling -- will be offered shortly, Cluphf said.

More than 90 percent of the graduates who have found work in the industry have gone to the Boeing Co. But 14 companies have hired graduates.

Due to the center's success, its caretaker, the Aerospace Futures Alliance, is working with Snohomish County and lobbying the state for money to renovate more of the building. This would nearly double the center's capacity.

Linda Lanham, executive director of the aerospace group, anticipates upgrades to the center wrap up by the end of April. In an interview last week, Lanham was optimistic that the center would get sufficient funding, despite the fact that the Legislature hadn't yet passed a budget.

"It's exciting to get this and to send more students through" training, she said.

Lanham also expected the state to fund a similar training center in Renton. In the future, she noted, training centers, community colleges and other workforce training groups will need to continue to work closely together to get the right mix of training needed by industry.

As for the center in Everett, "we're ready to go" when the upgrades are completed, Cluphf said. "We're willing to go."

For more on the training center, visit washingтонаerospace.com.