

Half of local employers can't find skilled workers – Chamber



DAVE BATTAGELLO, WINDSOR STAR

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St. Clair College skilled trades instructor Rob Kobielski, left, demonstrates on a three-axis CNC mill for students Faye Hoster, Samantha Clements, Ariel McCallum and Emily St. Croix, right, during Build a Dream on July 14, 2016. *NICK BRANCACCIO / WINDSOR STAR*

The local region is losing more than a half-billion dollars a year in foregone economic activity because not enough youth are showing an interest in the skilled trades, according to new study.

Too many young people lack either the desire or the awareness of how easily it would be to gain employment in the skilled trades sector, a joint report by the provincial and local chambers of commerce suggests.

The number of Windsor area companies reporting an inability to find enough skilled trades employees has doubled in just three years from 26 per cent in 2013 to 51 per cent in 2016, according to the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce.

“We lead the province in difficulty in finding qualified people,” said Matt Marchand, the local chamber’s president and CEO.

“In the past three years, when we talk about the skills shortage in our community, it’s very real. One out of every two employers in our region has been having difficulty finding qualified staff.”

Employment shortages can be found in nearly every skilled trade, ranging from heating and cooling, building trades, electricians, plumbers, mechanical engineers, welders or mechanics, he said.

“It’s across the board,” Marchand said. “We need to head this off at the pass and do a better job in letting people know there are jobs to be had and money to be made in skilled trades, period.”

The local chamber joined with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce to release a 39-page report, entitled Talent in Transition, which includes 10 recommendations designed to address troubles employers are having finding qualified workers.

The skilled trades gap is costing the Windsor-Essex region an estimated \$600-million loss in annual economic activity, the report states.

It’s projected that 40 per cent of those presently employed in the skilled trades sector across the province will retire within the next decade. According to Skills Canada, only 26 per cent of young people between the ages of 13 and 24 are training or considering a career in the skilled trades sector.

“Ontario employers are finding it more and more challenging to recruit properly qualified talent,” said Richard Koroscil, interim-president and CEO of the Ontario chamber. “If improvements are not made, we will find ourselves in a situation where there are people without jobs and jobs without people.

“Our report identifies opportunities to improve alignment of skills, education and career opportunities.”

One of the recommendations to improve the employment gap includes better promotion of skilled trades that are in demand.

“We are not doing a good enough job to get the message out,” Marchand said. “There are a tremendous amount of jobs. There is such a high demand that people could even open up their own business. The sky is the limit.”

Among other recommendations:

- More promotion is needed within community colleges and universities.
- Parents need to be encouraged to steer their children into the field.
- There needs to be more internships and co-op work opportunities offered at a younger age.
- Employers should be given tax credits to hire apprentices.
- Consideration should be given to lower the permitted workplace ratio for journeymen to apprentices.

“We need to properly lay the foundation so we can better align training to the demand for skilled trades within the marketplace,” Marchand said.

“Everybody involved — chambers, employers, schools — has a role to play. We all need to do a better job.”

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