

Steel Fabricators Council Meeting Summary

Greater Memphis Chamber

April 26, 2016

11:00 a.m. – 1:15 p.m.

Attendees

Companies

- Barnhart Crane – David Dingeldein
- GMW, Inc. – Tim Smith
- Keeler Iron Works – Clay Keeler
- Newberry Tanks – Chris Long
- NKC of America – John Armistead
- Plant Maintenance Service Corp. – David Galtelli
- Plant Maintenance Service Corp. – Stan Rodgers
- Providential Fabricators – Rich Riegel
- Quality Iron – Jeremy Clark
- Rees-Memphis – Andy Cowan
- Rees Memphis – Dick Cowan
- SFI Fabrication – John Howard
- Southern Steel Supply – Neil Cohen
- Southern Systems Inc. – Billy Potts
- Tri-State Ironworks – Bill Bradshaw
- Trumbo – Dale Norris

Staff

Greater Memphis Alliance for a Competitive Workforce

- Pauline Vernon
- Latanyua Robinson

Greater Memphis Chamber

- Anita Brackin
- Delories Williams

Workforce Resources

Arkansas State University Mid-South

- Pete Selden

Southwest Tennessee Community College

- Mike Stephens

- Taylor Tagg

Tennessee College of Applied Technology

- Andy Helms
- Bond Stewart

Workforce Development Board of Eastern Arkansas

- Angela Robinson

Workforce Investment Network

- Melanie Winfield

Guests

The Manufacturing Institute, NAM

- Brent Weil
- Katherine McClelland

Thomas P. Miller & Associates

- Sara Hunt

Welcome and Introductions

- Pauline Vernon provided an overview of the work of the partners in the Greater Memphis Alliance for a Competitive Workforce (GMACW). Some of those activities include initiating sector councils based off the recommendations of the [Brookings Focus Report: A Roadmap for Transforming the Metro Memphis Economy](#), and the alignment of the GMACW partner schools to better meet the talent needs of the high demand regional sectors.
- Andy Cowan welcomed the group and explained how Rees-Memphis, like many other companies, has worked individually to set up school partnerships, set up advertisements, and take other steps to recruit candidates. He stressed the value of speaking with one voice as steel

fabricators in the Greater Memphis area. He thanked the group for their participation and noted opportunities to work with the GMACW consortium on curriculum.

- The company representatives indicated their interest in knowledge sharing and noted a particular interest in working with schools on STEM curriculum, understanding the resources available, and planning for continued growth of the training programs in the region. They also expressed interest in internships in order to provide hands-on experience in real world welding and fabrication environments.

The Regional Skills Gap, Need for Steel Fabrication, and Role of GMACW Partnership

- Katherine McClelland gave an overview of the current and projected skills gap in welding across the nation and specifically for the Memphis Region, pointing out that about 45 percent of welders are over the age of 45. Some solutions include participating in Manufacturing Day and other ways to raise the profile of welding and fabrication jobs, as well as working with schools to deliver candidates with the right skills and certifications. (See attached presentation).
- Sara Hunt highlighted the initial work that GMACW is conducting on enhancing and aligning education and career pathways, with a focus on Structural Metal Fabricators and Fitters; Welders, Cutters, and Welder Fitters; and Welding, Soldering, and Brazing Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders. The pathways will show education and career progression from foundational and work-ready skills up to higher-level welding skills and certifications. (See attached presentation).
- Latanyua Robinson provided an overview of www.MemphisWorks.com, the online platform for students, educators, and employers designed to increase interest and connection points for future jobs and careers. The site includes a growing number of videos showing jobs in the Memphis area.
- Pauline Vernon and Andy Cowan initiated a discussion around the formation of a fabricator council, similar to the already-established Medical Device Council, to provide a united voice for the talent needs in the steel fabrication sector. (It was noted how much louder the voice of the medical device sector has become because of this strong organization (which was organized into a 501(c)6).

Common Themes

- Employers in the room agreed that a focus for the GMACW consortium schools should be around job readiness, as many indicated that they face issues with new hires understanding the importance of arriving on time, work ethic generally, and soft skills. They would also like to see improved financial literacy training for students, as this is a common problem for new employees.
 - In order to be ready for the workplace, employers agreed that students must have training in safety, quality, blueprint reading, and measurement—including tape measures.
- Although students may be leaving the current programs able to pass welding exams, employers agreed that there is a need for further hands-on, real-world job training. They stated that students need to have experience in the field outside a welding booth, including welding outdoors and in tight spaces.

- Issues also arise with endurance for a full workday, and employers are finding that if the students are only experiencing a few hours of welding at a time, they are not prepared for the long hours that they experience on the job.
- Some of this experience could come through internships with companies around the Mid-South region, with opportunities to understand the different types of job options in welding.
- The employers indicated that they would like to see refresher courses for people who have been out of the workforce for some period.
- The consensus among the employers were that there is an immediate need for fitters because the majority of the incumbent fitters are aging out of the workforce.
 - GWM, Keeler, SFI, and Tri-State all indicated they would support a pathway for fitters and would help with developing programs and courses.

Decisions

- There was a strong consensus behind a council focused specifically on steel fabrication. Employers agreed they would meet initially every other month.
- Andy Cowan was selected as the council chair. David Dingeldein was nominated for vice chair and accepted the position.

Recommendations for moving forward

- Have additional meetings at the GMACW consortium education facilities and discuss how their programs are able to meet the sector's talent needs.
 - The schools and WIN can describe their current programs and equipment, and the employers can help direct the alignment of pathways and future needs.
- Provide opportunities for employers in the Fabricators Council to donate equipment, blueprints, and materials so student training is more relevant to actual job conditions.
- Begin to prepare for Manufacturing Day and discuss how the Metal Fabricators Council can unite to play a larger role in this effort.
- Build out recommendations for employers to engage with local workforce for what they can take advantage of now, such as the Workforce Investment Network.
- Consider incorporating Instagram into the Memphis Works platform.
- Have the group decide on five (5) questions that all welders should be able to video answer in 60 seconds to contribute to Memphis Works site.
- Create a financial literacy course that can be completed on the MemphisWorks site, and have employers incorporate this into an onboarding requirement.
- Validate the competency requirements for fitters so they can be incorporated into the education and training pathways. This may also include a survey of council members on the numbers of fitters they expect to hire now and over the next several years, which would help GMACW plan appropriate training and recruitment.