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Woodworking Network

Labor Department Approves Woodwork Manufacturing Specialist Apprenticeship Program

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<https://www.woodworkingnetwork.com/news/woodworking-industry-news/labor-department-approves-woodwork-manufacturing-specialist-0#:~:text=Labor%20Department%20approves%20woodwork%20manufacturing%20specialist%20apprenticeship%20program.-By%20Rich%20Christianson&text=Under%20the%20competency%2Dbased%20occupational.incentives%20and%20federal%20workforce%20funds.>

WASHINGTON DC – The woodworking industry can begin training apprentices to become “woodwork manufacturing specialists” under a new credentialing program approved by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training, Office of Apprenticeship.

Under the competency-based occupational framework of the program, woodworking employers could qualify for state tax incentives and federal workforce funds. Individuals who participate in the apprenticeship program would receive a national, industry-recognized credential as a registered woodwork manufacturing specialist. In addition, veterans who qualify for GI Bill benefits could receive a monthly stipend in addition to the wages they receive.

The Office of Apprenticeship’s approval caps a three-year collaboration that included industry and education leaders with assistance from the Urban Institute of Washington DC and Workforce Intelligence Network (WIN) of Taylor, Mich. The manufacturing specialist program is the brainchild of Kelly Victor-Burke, majority owner of Burke Architectural Millwork of Livonia, Mich. She drafted the initial framework to address the employment gap in the wood products industry through cross-training and upskilling new and existing employees in a combination of CAD, mechatronics, wood processing, coatings, estimating and project management.

“Woodwork manufacturers need to attract workers who are flexible, innovative critical thinkers, willing to master a variety of skills necessary to become valued employees within their organization,” Victor-Burke said. “This registered apprenticeship allows these employees to become leaders in their workplace. As well, this combination of highly sought after and in-demand technical skills will result in an employee earning a higher median rate of pay throughout their career, which will help with retention.”

Burke Architectural Millwork wasted no time in registering Logan Leinbach as the nation’s first woodwork manufacturing specialist apprentice. “For the past three years he has been enrolled in a similar apprenticeship while we worked on getting this approved. We never gave up or thought it wouldn’t gain DOL approval,” Victor-Burke said.

Mark Smith, woodworking instructor at Reed-Custer High School in Braidwood, Ill., said one of the main advantages of using a competency-based occupational framework is that the woodwork manufacturing



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specialist program is built on skill standards as opposed to time-based requirements used in traditional apprenticeship models.

Dr. Diana Elliott, principal research associate of the Urban Institute, said, “The woodworking manufacturing specialist framework represents the culmination of a partnership with multiple employers and intermediaries to develop a document that millworks and woodworking manufacturers nationwide can use to develop a top-of-the-line apprenticeship program. Now that the U.S, Department of Labor has officially released this, we are encouraged that employers will adopt this document to train new workers in the profession.”

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