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Program to offer high-tech training

Colleges to give local workers a chance to improve their skills, job prospects.

Monday, August 16, 2004

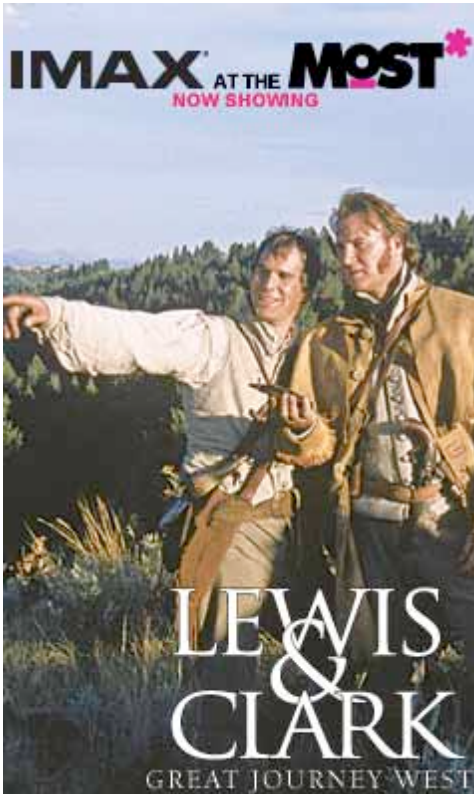
By **Nancy Buczek**
Staff writer

Salvatore Spuches, who was laid off in April from Carrier Corp., plans to be among the first students to take advantage of a new college program developed with the help of a \$1.2 million federal grant.

Spuches, 56, was a manufacturing engineer who in 1977 received a bachelor's degree in wood product engineering.

"After so many years I just wanted to get back and sharpen my skills and then continue on," said Spuches, who plans to also pursue a master's degree.

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Several local colleges are partnering with the Manufacturers Association of Central New York, which received the grant in February, to educate local workers for high-skill jobs. The goal of the Department of Labor in awarding the grant is to train American workers for jobs that U.S. companies may be importing workers for because of a lack of certain types of high-tech skills.

The federal government issues what are called H1B visas to foreign workers who are hired by American companies because the skills needed can't be found locally.

"The idea that there's potentially somebody in Camillus that could fill that slot if not for having the opportunity to get some of these skills means to me we should be providing an opportunity for that person to get those skills," said Cornelius "Neil" Murphy Jr., president of the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry.

ESF officials worked with MACNY in creating four certificates of advanced study: advanced engineering tools; bioprocess engineering; indoor environmental quality; and renewable energy, design and construction.

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ESF reached out to officials at Le Moyne College, SUNY Upstate Medical University, Syracuse University, the New York Indoor Environmental Quality Center and local businesses to help design and offer the four programs.

The programs are closely aligned with the types of business and industry that local economic development agencies have identified as strengths or opportunities for Central New York, said Karen DeJarnette, MACNY's training and corporate development director.

"For our area, what is really critical when you think about the growth of technology that we want to see here, the way that we want to attract business to this area is by having a pool of workers that have these kinds of skills. We knew that in order to get those kinds of businesses here, we needed to have this grant to help train people," DeJarnette said.

The grant requires a \$1.2 million community match, which can come in the form of in-kind services, such as a business donating its facilities for a lesson or local business officials guest-lecturing, or it can come in the form of hard dollars, such as the fee for the certificate, DeJarnette said.

Spuches, who lives in Clay, said he plans to begin taking courses for the advanced engineering tools program this fall. It will be the first of the four new programs launched and has about 10 students enrolled. The program can accommodate about 15.

Spuches has been looking for work without luck. After earning the advanced engineering tools certificate, he plans to pursue a master's degree from ESF, where he had earned his bachelor's degree. The certificate courses will count toward his master's degree.

Each program will have a lead school that will award the certificate, although more than one school may be involved in offering the courses.

"It's an opportunity for the colleges to collaborate in developing something that can actually bring something to the area and position companies with a skill set that is unique to the area," said Lynda Hanrahan, an ESF project staff associate.

The certificates target individuals with bachelor's degrees who are unemployed or underemployed.

Individuals who are working and want to upgrade their skills can also benefit from the certificates. To accommodate working individuals or people with families, the courses will be offered in the evenings and some Saturdays.

Lowell McBurney, vice president of Blasland, Bouck & Lee, helped design the curriculum for the advanced engineering tools certificate. He said BBL employs a small number of individuals who have H1B visas. He wouldn't say how many.

McBurney said he doesn't envision the MACNY program doing away with international employees, but rather offering an educational opportunity for all employees of a company.

"The way ESF has packaged and bundled this, it's really designed for the working professional," McBurney said.

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