Vigor Industrial Workforce Development Initiatives

Swan Island Training Center, Portland Oregon
In 2008, Vigor partnered with Portland Community College to open a training center at Vigor’s Swan Island shipyard in order to create a pipeline of workers with the right welding skills for shipyard work. Vigor provides space and tools, while the college administers the course, including admissions, and issues certificates. Vigor provided input to help adapt the college’s existing welding curriculum for shipyard work.

The Swan Island Training Center provides hands-on welding training. The center began offering one class with 20 spaces, and quickly expanded to include two classes per day. Each class runs five hours a day, four days a week. Both classes have full enrollment, and the center has a waiting list of about 100 people.

While students have the option of taking a complete year-long class to earn college credit, the course enrolls people year round and allows students to move into work as soon as they feel they have the skills and qualifications needed to land the jobs they want or return to existing jobs with critically needed skills.

Results: Over the years, Vigor has hired more than 40 percent of jobseekers who completed training at the center. In addition to the PCC courses, the center is also used after hours for training and certifications of our existing workforce.

Press
Better schools, better jobs: As Oregon beefs up worker training, speed matters, The Oregonian. Oct. 21, 2012
Welding partnership reinvigorates industry, PCC Newsletter. Aug. 4, 2008

Harbor Island Training Center - Seattle, Washington
Drawing on the experience with the Swan Island Training Center, Vigor and South Seattle Community College partnered to launch an industrial training center last year in order to provide students with the skills they need to enter family-wage careers at the region’s industrial manufacturers.

Vigor provided the space, built the 8,000-square foot Harbor Island Training Center, and outfitted it with weld booths, a computer lab, a dedicated tool room, and machining equipment. The center is located at Vigor Industrial’s shipyard on Harbor Island. The college has developed a 20-week welding-intensive curriculum which aims to produce workers with the skills needed to begin industrial careers at Vigor’s shipyard and other area manufacturers. The classes impart core skills needed for skilled manufacturing work, including welding, blueprint reading, fabrication, applied math, and safety procedures through both hands-on training and classroom instruction.

Beyond the college and Vigor, several other groups stepped up to make this center a reality. The center received funding from the state of Washington, the Pipefitters union donated new welding equipment, and thanks to facilitation by Sen. Patty Murray, the Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County was able to identify and win financial aid covering tuition for displaced workers and other students in need in the first class.

Results: One month after the first class graduated from the training center, more than two-thirds of the 19-person class had secured jobs that used their new skills. Five have come to work at Vigor, with
the remainder finding employment at other maritime companies including Foss, as well as non-maritime companies such as Nucor Steel. In addition to the college welding program, the center is also used after hours for training and certifications of our existing workforce.

Demographics

The inaugural class was characterized by high financial need and significant diversity in age, race/ethnicity, and educational background.

- **40 percent** non-white
- **50 percent** 19-30 years old, with other candidates ranging from 30 into the mid-50s.
- **About half** currently receiving unemployment
- **About half** currently receiving basic food benefits
- **86 percent** with only high school degrees; other candidates’ education ranges from associate’s degrees to MFA

The current class is similarly diverse, although we do not have final demographic data on the students at this time.

Press:

- [A Welder Reflects: 'I'm A Different Person Than I Was. I Have A Trade,'](#) KUOW Radio. Dec. 27, 2013

Pathways to Manufacturing – Portland, Oregon

Vigor is a founding partner in the Pathways to Manufacturing program, which prepares Portland-area high school students for family-wage jobs at local industrial companies. The program connects students with a passion for working with their hands to local employers through tours, internships, job shadowing and mentorships from local industrial employers.

The program came about as a response to a set of interlocking problems in Portland. Vigor and other industrial employers see a dearth of qualified applicants for skilled industrial jobs like machining and welding. At the same time, Portland Public School District has a 38 percent dropout rate. One of the few bright spots in the district is PPS’s vocational school, which has a dropout rate of less than half the districts overall rate and a wait list of students eager to attend the school.

Pathways was set up to identify and remove the obstacles preventing students who have the talent and desire to work with their hands from landing family wage industrial jobs in their communities, and at the same time develop a local pipeline of high quality young workers with the skills local manufacturers need.
**Results:** Vigor hosted three interns over the summer and hired each of them. At 18 and 19 years old, the graduates are the youngest members of our workforce. This year, the program has expanded to include more students in the Portland area, and more local manufacturers have signed on to host tours, job shadows, and internships, strengthening the network of employers the students have access to.

**Press:**

Intern Program Puts High School Students To Work, OPB Radio. July 18, 2013
From Shop Class To Shipyard: Oregon’s Plan For Industrial Interns, NPR Radio. Nov. 29, 2013
(The comments on this story reflect the kind of support we’ve been seeing locally.)

University of Alaska partnership, Ketchikan Alaska

In late 2013, Vigor Alaska teamed up the Alaska Workforce Investment Board (AWIB) and the University of Alaska Southeast Ketchikan Campus (UAS-Ketchikan) to create an industry-led training program. The program was charged with identifying the most effective ways to meet the Ketchikan shipyard’s need for skilled workers and to provide Alaskans with family-wage career options.

Vigor worked with the college to modify the existing math curriculum to meet the most pressing skills needs at the shipyard, to provide the flexibility to adapt to changing workforce needs, and to allow workers to advance in specific vocational skills. The first class, which commenced January 28 and runs through February 19, focuses on basic shop math skills. The next level of classes begins February 25 and will build on the basic math foundation to teach skills including welding, blueprint reading, basic refrigeration (a key component of systems on vessels, including catcher-processor fishing boats), and introduction to marine electrical systems. University of Alaska Instructors will teach blueprint reading and refrigeration, while experienced Vigor workers will teach welding and introduction to marine electrical systems. The classroom portions of the classes will be taught at the UAS-Ketchikan Campus and those requiring hands-on practice will take place at the Ketchikan Shipyard.

The program was launched with the help of a $54,000 grant from the AWIB designed to support efforts and upgrade knowledge and skills of industrial workers supporting the oil and gas sector in Ketchikan and Southeast Alaska. Vigor also contributed $9,000 of its own money as an industry match. The AWIB grant targets 280 targeted oil and gas occupations Assemblers and Fabricators, Crane and Tower Operators, and Refrigeration Mechanics that exist in Alaska. Nearly 200 of those occupations can be found employed at the Ketchikan Shipyard.

Beyond the goal of quickly preparing people to enter into family-wage industrial careers, the training program is also a pilot to develop curriculum and training methodology that:

- are transferable to other communities and regions
- are transferable to industry sectors beyond the shipyard, including oil and gas
- foster collaboration between industry and training providers
- are sustainable over the long term through cost sharing and work experience

**Results:** About a third of our current workforce in Ketchikan signed up for the shop math course. The course is voluntary and employees take it on their own time. We expect to see immediate improvements in productivity, morale and the ability for workers to apply their new skills to a variety of shipyard jobs. The Vigor Alaska training program begins with entry-level knowledge and skills that are required in a wide variety of industrial activities, in the shipyard and beyond. Perhaps one of the most
important outcomes of this training is proving that a partnership between industry, educators and government can deliver a curriculum and a workplace training program that meet the needs of industry while opening up new opportunities for members of our communities.