

The Heroes MAKE America Program

BY CAROLYN LEE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE MANUFACTURING INSTITUTE

» Every year, more than 200,000 U.S. service members return to civilian life. These are our nation's best and brightest men and women who are used to putting their talents to work in a mission larger than themselves, who are accustomed to working in teams, and who possess the very skills and talents that would make them excellent additions to any manufacturing shop floor. So, at a time when there are about 364,000 unfilled jobs in manufacturing—and an anticipated more than 2 million that could go unfilled in the years ahead—why would we not connect these heroes to the job opportunities that can enrich their lives while also helping to move our industry forward? It's just common sense. Well, that's where Heroes MAKE America comes in.

The organization I lead—the National Association of Manufacturers' Manufacturing Institute, which is dedicated to building the manufacturing workforce of today and inspiring the manufacturing workforce of tomorrow—worked to develop the Heroes MAKE America program to connect manufacturers with highly qualified veteran candidates and give those veterans the tools and training they need to not only find a perfect manufacturing job, but excel in it.

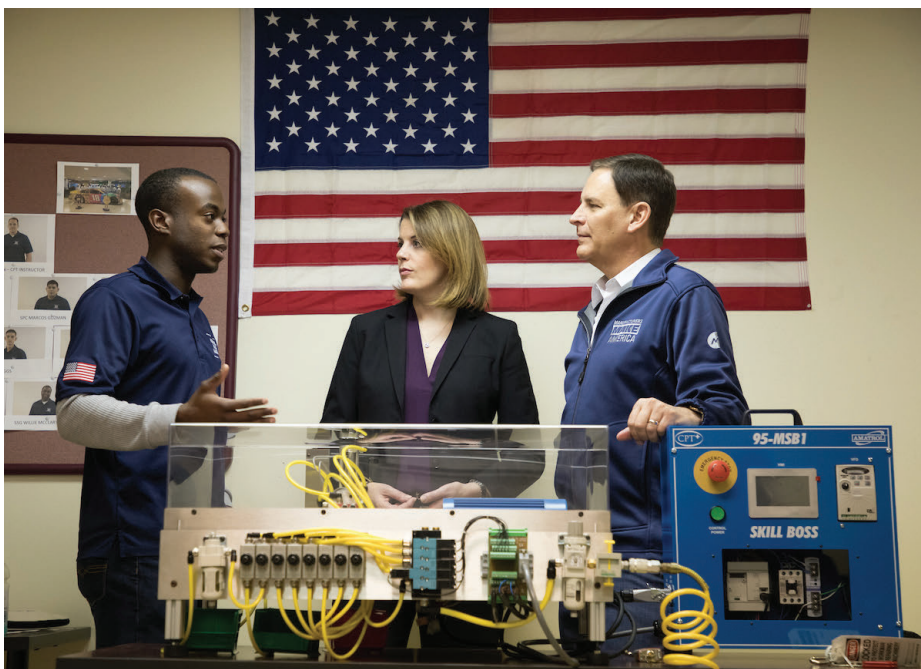
In January, we launched Heroes at an event in Fort Riley, Kansas and inaugurated the first class of 13 heroes. Then in March, we returned to officiate their graduation ceremony. In the 10 weeks that had passed since the program began, those soldiers received career training in everything from résumé



Top: The Manufacturing Institute created the Heroes MAKE America program in an effort to build a pipeline from military to manufacturing careers for transitioning service members. Bottom: Jay Timmons and Carolyn Lee with the inaugural class of Heroes MAKE America.

writing, to social media management, to personal finance. They participated in a range of networking opportunities, facility

tours, job interviews and assessments. At the end, they earned 14 college credits and nine industry certifications, along



Top: Jay Timmons, CEO of the National Association of Manufacturers, and Carolyn Lee, Executive Director of the Manufacturing Institute, attend the launch event for Heroes MAKE America. Left: Heroes MAKE America is a full-time, 10-week career skills program, that launched in partnership with the U.S. Army Soldier for Life – Transition Assistance Program at Fort Riley and the USO Pathfinder Program at Fort Riley.

with more than 50 job interviews, nearly a dozen job offers and with about half of the graduates receiving a job offer they planned to accept already (all before these soldiers had even graduated from the program).

Not only does the Institute plan to run the Heroes program four times a year at Fort Riley moving forward, but this summer,

it will expand the opportunities of the Heroes program by launching at Fort Hood in Texas. This means that the Institute and our partners in the Heroes program can train even more service members for rewarding careers in manufacturing. It also underlines the fact that, with company support, the Institute can do even more to grow the pipeline from military to

manufacturing, as we rely on contributions from manufacturing leaders to fund important programs like this one.

The program has already secured the support of sponsors the Arconic Foundation, the Walmart Foundation and Parker Hannifin Corporation, as well as manufacturing partners Amarr Entrematic, Arconic Aerospace Center, Berry Global, BNSF Railroad, Cargill Protein, Caterpillar, Florence Corporation, Georgia-Pacific, The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company, Hallmark Cards, Hormel Foods Corporation, Koch Industries, Manko Windows, Mars Chocolate North America, Orbital ATK, Smithfield Foods, Spirit AeroSystems, The J.M. Smucker Company, Tyson Foods and the Kansas Chamber of Commerce & Industry. Program partners at Fort Riley include USO Pathfinder, KansasWorks, Kansas State University and our education provider, Washburn Institute of Technology.

Our nation owes a lot to its heroes in uniform. They don't ask much in return. Mostly they want the opportunity to serve—with honor and respect, with the tools and training to get the job done, with the means to make a decent life for their families. When these heroes come home, they should have similar opportunities too. That's what I believe, that's what the Institute believes, and that's what the Institute's Heroes MAKE America program is all about. That's why I think Heroes is going to be a game-changer for an industry in need of skilled workers, why it's going to be such a life-changer for the veterans and their families who continue to fill those jobs and why I know this exciting opportunity will continue to expand, grow and make a difference moving forward. ■