



Press Release
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Industry and Education Members Help Draft New DOL “Woodwork Manufacturing Specialist” Registered Apprenticeship



(Pictured above from left to right) Burt Bilbrey-Designer at ITS; Mark Smith-Industrial Technology Teacher, Reed-Custer High School, Braidwood, IL; Ezra Drissman-Owner-D and E Wood Products; Richard Ganas-owner Ganas MFG; Alan Dodkowitz-Research Associate at the Urban Institute in Washington, DC; Batia Katz-Research Associate at the Urban Institute in Washington DC; Janene Erne-Regional Apprenticeship Administrator Workforce Intelligence Network (WIN), Anthony Vitale-Owner Probuilt Woodworking; Kelly Victor-Burke-Majority Owner Burke Architectural Millwork. August 2019

The U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Office of Apprenticeship (OA) has announced approval of a new Competency-based Occupational Framework (CBOF) for the occupation of Woodwork Manufacturing Specialist. For the past 3 years, a group of visionary industry and education members from Michigan and across the country collaborated on drafting the framework for an innovative 21st century registered apprenticeship, “Woodwork Manufacturing Specialist” with assistance from the Urban Institute in Washington DC and Workplace Intelligence Network (WIN) and led by Kelly Victor-Burke of Burke Architectural Millwork, who conceived and drafted the initial framework.

The newly approved registered apprenticeship was created to address the employment gap in woodworking and manufacturing industries through cross-training and upskilling new and existing employees in a combination of CAD, mechatronics, wood processing operations, coatings, estimating and project managing. This registered apprenticeship is available to woodwork companies/manufacturers and their employees across the United States in perpetuity.

“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. 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”, states Victor-Burke.

Woodwork educator Mark Smith describes how innovative and unique the framework for the apprenticeship is because this it utilizes a, “Competency-Based Occupational Framework (CBOF)”. He adds, “Old, established frameworks/apprenticeships have traditionally been hour/time based. CBOFs are innovative in their design. The new framework will be based on skill standards.”

Dr. Diana Elliott, Principal Research Associate at the Urban Institute states, “The competency-based occupational frameworks that Urban Institute develops with our partners go through an extensive development process that results in a high-quality document available to all to use. 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 US Department of Labor has officially released this, we are encouraged that employers will adopt this document to train new workers in the profession.”

Burke Architectural Millwork already has the country’s first apprentice, Logan Leinbach registered in the new occupation. “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 explains.



Burke Architectural Millwork owner, Kelly Victor-Burke and Apprentice Logan Leinbach

“It was incredible to have the backing and support of educational intuitions like Schoolcraft College and Reed-Custer High School, as well as the Workplace Intelligence Network (WIN), the Department of Labor, the Urban Institute, the Michigan Manufacturers Association, and fellow woodworking companies. As a group, we feel profoundly proud and powerful as changemakers in our industry and community.” says Victor-Burke, majority owner of Michigan’s first WBENC Certified Women’s Business Enterprise (WBE) producing custom architectural millwork.

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