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Mesa Community College, CMC Steel Arizona train the steelmakers of tomorrow



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The CMC Steel Arizona Modern Steelmaker Program, a year-long course of intensive study designed specifically for employees of CMC, focuses on technical training including electronics, pneumatics and welding, manufacturing operations, computer skills, data analytics and leadership training.

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A first-time collaboration between Arizona Advanced Manufacturing Institute at Mesa Community College and Commercial Metals Co.'s micro mill in Mesa, CMC Steel Arizona, is offering an innovative training program developing a workforce of steelmakers for the 21st century.

“CMC Steel Arizona values its employees and desired to expand growth opportunities from within to meet the demand for qualified leaders as they expanded their facility in Mesa,” Leah Palmer, AzAMI executive director, said in a release. “Because of the need to ‘grow their own’ we worked together to design a solution based on industry best practices.”

The CMC Steel Arizona Modern Steelmaker Program, a year-long course of intensive study designed specifically for employees of CMC, focuses on technical training including electronics, pneumatics and welding, manufacturing operations, computer skills, data analytics and leadership training. Students earn 30 college credits in four months in addition to employability workplace skills.

“This demonstrates the scope of the coursework that was digested in a brief period of time,” Palmer said.

The program launched in March 2021 with 16 employees, selected from more than 50 employees who applied for the program, from CMC locations across the country.

The program assists the company in preparing a more skilled workforce in the short- and long-term.

“This group of employees will be highly technically trained, receive on-the-job rotational training, business support training and leadership training — really creating a well-rounded employee who can lead in peer and leadership roles and be integral in the development of our future workforce,” Jessica Carpenter, director of human resources at CMC, said in the release.

CMC is headquartered in Irving, Texas, with sites across the U.S., Europe and Asia. The company operates local recycling centers, steel mini-mills, micro mills, large-scale fabrication centers, heat treating facilities and other metals-related operations.

Creating the program took nearly a full year of planning, working with faculty, national recruitment, accelerated scheduling and funding, Palmer said.



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While the curriculum is based on a course outline provided by CMC, featuring technology training that meets its current needs and can be adapted as the industry evolves, Palmer noted, “MCC manufacturing faculty was committed to creating an accelerated program in key technologies such as automation, mechanical electrical, welding and machining.”

Palmer said MCC provided grants for certifications earned in the courses while other funding came from state and federal grants for apprenticeships and certifications and from CMC Steel Arizona which paid for tuition and salaries while program participants were earning and learning.

Carpenter explained that the company contacted several Arizona community colleges and trade schools to help them develop the program but after discussions with MCC, “It became apparent that the AzAMI program curriculum would meet our basic needs and that the instructors are well qualified, understood our business and connected with our employees. Even more importantly, MCC was willing to tailor some of the programs to include information specific to our company.”

The college also adjusted its instructor schedules to transition from a more typical college course to intensive, 40-hour per week courses.

With course study now completed, the students are in an eight-month apprenticeship at CMC Steel Arizona. Employees rotate through each operational department as well as maintenance, spending approximately nine weeks in each area training on specific skills. While they receive in-depth technical training in smaller, specific and highly technical areas of operations, they also receive training in departments that support operations (sales, customer service, environmental and purchasing), in addition to finance, leadership and participation in collaboration and team building activities.

CMC is building its third micro mill in Mesa, which will produce both reinforcing steel and merchant bar products through a continuous process.

Carpenter said the mill will also include state-of-the-art technology allowing it to directly connect to renewable energy sources.

“Commercial Metals Company is one of the most efficient steel producers in the world and this new advanced technology reinforces our commitment to green steel making,” Carpenter said. “This expansion opens opportunities for new employees to find lasting, innovative and exciting careers with our company.”

She also said the experience working with AzAMI and MCC “has been excellent from the beginning and throughout the program. In the initial planning stages, the team was interested in learning about what we needed, focused on identifying solutions to meet those needs and was willing to be creative, flexible and think outside the box.”

“CMC Steel Arizona’s Steel Makers Program is a pacesetter for developing more targeted interventions for industries that are willing to grow their talent to meet demand,” Palmer said. “The investment speaks volumes about Commercial Metals Co. Building the pipeline jointly is possible to meet the need for advanced manufacturing. Truly collaborating and being willing to also have new innovative thinking and compromise for a better solution is what makes these types of programs successful.”

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