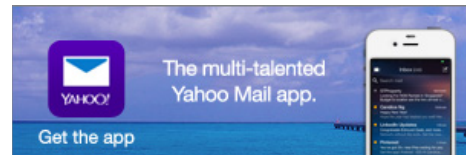


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Community college program leads to high-paying jobs

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MESA, Ariz. -- Enrollment is growing at the Arizona Advanced Manufacturing Institute (AzAMI) at Mesa Community College. It was started by aerospace companies in the Valley because they needed more skilled employees. "I have employers contacting me almost daily asking me who's your next guy and when are they ready," said Joe Martinez with Mesa Community College. As jobs come back from overseas, there are not enough skilled workers to fill the open positions. "Right now industry is looking for precision machinists but they're not out there to be found because it wasn't popular for students to go through and do this," said Martinez. Excalibur Precision makes parts for military aircraft. The company is sponsoring the AzAMI program at Mesa Community College to keep the business growing. "As a manufacturer my biggest problem is finding qualified employees," said Mark Weathers, the president of Excalibur Precision. "This is essentially a survival mechanism for us." Students can make \$40,000 to \$50,000 year on the job after they complete the three year program, earning certifications and degrees. "Good solid jobs. They pay a good living wage. They're challenging," said Weathers. Michael Bissett, 21, is working on his mechanical engineering degree and other certifications at the AzAMI. He currently earns \$17 an hour at Excalibur Precision while going to school. The company is sponsoring his apprenticeship. "I just know there are shops out there that would be dying to pick up a person with the capabilities that I have," said Bissett. "It's opened up many different things for me to learn. Things to fall back on and I never thought it could be possible." Bissett's pay will double when he completes the AzAMI program and he could be earning a six-figure annual salary in a few years. The AzAMI is not just for young people. "At the end of the day you get to put your hands on the thing that you made, which is a very satisfying feeling," said Jason Steiner, 42, who is starting a new career in manufacturing. "It's getting me a place to start, basic skills."

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