

## NEWS AND INFORMATION UPDATE FROM THE NATIONAL SKILL STANDARDS BOARD

## From the Director

I'm delighted to announce the launching of the first two industry coalitions that will build parts of the national skill standards system, with several more due to join them by year's end. The first two coalitions cover 1) Manufacturing, Installation and Repair; and 2) Retail Trade, Wholesale Trade, Real Estate and Personal Services. Both coalitions are working hard to assemble the kind of broad-based partnerships among employers, workers, educators, state and local governments, community groups and others necessary to ensure that the skill standards they develop will meet the needs of everyone who uses the system. The Manufacturing coalition is led by the National Coalition for Advanced Manufacturing (contact C.J. Shroll, 202-216-2742 or [cjshroll@aol.com](mailto:cjshroll@aol.com)) and the AFL-CIO's Industrial Union Department (contact Ellen Scully, 202-842-7865). The Retail and Wholesale Trade coalition is led by the National Retail Institute (Kathy Mannes, 202-626-8110; Internet address is [www.nrf.com/nri/](http://www.nrf.com/nri/)). I encourage your organization to get involved in this effort, and to contact the appropriate group to let them know of your interest.

Stay tuned to our Website ([www.nssb.org](http://www.nssb.org)) for the upcoming announcement of the grantees who will lead the NSSB coalitions in five more industries: Finance and Insurance; Construction; Education and Training; Restaurants, Hotels, and Hospitality; and Communications, Entertainment, and Information.

I'm also proud to announce the inauguration of the NSSB Awards Program, which will showcase organizations whose work contributes to the development of skill standards systems. The NSSB Awards Program encompasses two types of awards: Recognition Awards and Best Practice Awards. Any organization or coalition

of organizations is eligible for an award, including employers, states, unions, educational or training institutions or systems, associations, the prospective Voluntary Partnerships, etc. For each category, awards will be made to as many organizations as genuinely qualify (in other words, awards will not be limited to one per category).

Grounds for awards include but are not limited to: coalition building effectiveness; promoting access, diversity, and civil rights; descriptions of work for the purpose of setting standards; using skill standards to further high performance work practices; incorporating occupational, academic, and employability knowledge and skills in skill standards; incorporating mechanisms in skill standards to promote upward mobility; clear specification of entry-level and higher performance levels; assessment approach; exemplary certification programs; education (including training) to deliver the standards; benchmarking for best practices, both national and international; and the establishment of a process to ensure continuous improvement in the standards.

If you would like to nominate an organization for an award, please mail the relevant information to the attention of the "Awards Program Coordinator" at the NSSB office.



Edie West

## INDIANA'S 'CAN DO' APPROACH TO SKILLS EDUCATION

At Indiana's oldest regional vocational school, Southeastern Career Center in Versailles, seniors who complete teacher Melodie Busch's business support course this year will walk away with a new state credential that is the first of its kind in the nation. They will join some 400 students who have already earned the new credential in one of seven employment fields -- bio-science, business support, electronics, health, metalworking, plastics, and printing -- in the state initiative's first two years.

Student accomplishment is symbolized by a handsome notebook embossed with the state seal. Inside is a "State of Indiana Certificate of Technical Achievement" certifying that the recipient has achieved the essential skills and technical proficiencies in a specific employment field. Each student's notebook also contains details of his or her performance assessment in each skill, academic transcripts, and samples of graded work. The notebook is intended to serve as an "open transcript" to which additional credentials can be

*continued on page 4*

### IN THIS ISSUE

Building upon our regular "best practice" feature on employers (p. 2), the theme of this issue of WorkWise showcases how educators (p. 1) and labor unions (p. 3) are benefiting from skill standards and/or the talents of workers. Our next issue will highlight the work of the first two NSSB funded coalitions, in manufacturing and retail and wholesale trade.

# Putting Their Stamp on Metalworking

They helped spur America's industrial revolution. But today, the nation's 10,000 precision metalworking companies face difficult challenges from fierce international competition in machine tooling and machine-crafted metal parts.

Characterized by small shops of 125 or fewer employees, the metalworking industry produces high-precision tools, dies, and moldings used to make metal parts, as well as the parts themselves, for everything from airplanes to toasters.

Another industry challenge is that many skilled metalworkers are reaching retirement age, while a whole new array of new high-tech equipment and methods must be mastered to enhance productivity. The route to survival, industry watchers say, is being mapped by pioneering companies like Ohio Stamping and Machine, Inc. (OSMI). A Springfield, Ohio-based metal-stamping business with 111 employees, OSMI has staked its modernization efforts on continuous skills training. "In the old days,"

says OSMI's training manager Jeff Powell, "all you needed was a good set of tools and the desire for a full day's work. Now many processes are computerized, and it's much more complex than it was even 10 years ago."

For the company's owners -- President Daniel P. McGregor and his brother, Executive Vice President James B. McGregor -- the decision in the late 1980's to invest in training was painful but obviously necessary. "We were beginning to change our entire production system at that point," says James McGregor. "We knew it would take new knowledge and that training would be required." Training costs are fully underwritten by the company.

OSMI executives started by replacing their twice-a-year wage review with a new "pay-for-skills" program that would link pay increments to employees' successful completion of on-the-job training. To test this approach, OSMI's most skilled machine technician -- Jeff Powell -- served as the

"guinea pig" trainee in trial curricula prepared by outside consultants. "Then we had to bite the bullet and say we needed a full-time training person," James McGregor says. Powell was the hands-down choice. "How could I justify putting our senior guy into a 'non-productive' position?" McGregor asks. "It's either that or the auction block."

"The whole industrial paradigm is changing," notes Executive Director Robert Sherman of the National Institute for Metalworking Skills (NIMS). "Many day-to-day job decisions are falling to the guy on the line. OSMI is an incredible company that recognized immediately the need for skill standards to deal with this change." NIMS, which plays a leadership role in the development of skill standards and certification processes for the metalworking field (including, in addition to metalforming shops like OSMI, other specialties such as machining; tool, die, and mold-making; and machine building and maintenance), provided industry-wide skill-standards benchmarks that enabled OSMI officials to validate the quality of their training curricula.

OSMI's training is now divided into four "levels," each taking about a year of one-hour sessions per week, proceeding from basic to advanced skills. The train-

ing program also covers literacy and critical thinking skills, and evaluations are primarily performance-based. Level I focuses on the basic mechanics and processes of operating metalforming equipment, and heavily emphasizes worker safety procedures. "The stakes are very high on safety," notes Powell, "so each training segment integrates instruction on safety into every process."

In Level II, trainees learn how to set machinery to exact numerical settings. Level III involves more advanced skills of die-setting and progressive die operations. In Level IV, workers learn how to manage overall set-ups of production lines, focusing on tooling, press equipment, and auxiliary equipment

With the training framework in place by the early 1990s, OSMI moved to a team-based organization of its production operations, drawing coordinators, team leaders, and additional trainers from the ranks of those at senior training levels. The company simultaneously began boosting production capacity in 1993, adding 40% more floor space, two more production lines, an expanded second shift, and a new third shift. Although this meant hiring many new people, in just three years the recruits ad-

*continued on page 5*

# UNION'S TRAINING PROGRAMS TOUCH A WHOLE COMMUNITY

In center-city Philadelphia, the lights go on early and stay on late at the Thomas Breslin Learning Center, run by District Council 1199C, a hospital and health-care workers' union affiliated with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), AFL-CIO.

Each year, the Breslin Center's staff of more than two dozen instructors provides up to 40 different education and training programs for thousands of area adults in basic academic as well as health-care skills. Although many labor unions offer training to their members, District 1199C is unique in opening its

With the overwhelming approval of union members, the Training and Upgrading Fund was established in 1974 through collective bargaining. The fund is a nonprofit educational entity governed by a trustee board comprising equal numbers of union and employer representatives. Its \$3-million annual operating budget comes from employer contributions negotiated under the union contract. The original trust agreement dedicates the fund to boosting employment opportunities, alleviating personnel shortages, and improving the quality of health care delivery through training.

From its inception, the Fund's educational mission has emphasized competency-based training linked to credentialing. Students are required to demonstrate their commitment by attending all classes and completing assignments. The Fund's educational program is approved by the Pennsylvania Board of Education, and the Breslin Center gives

the state certification exam in some health fields. "We're serious about creating career pathways for people," Ryan notes. "The credential they earn has to have value, so they can use it to advance in their work or go on to further education."

The union worked hard to convince employers to support additional training for nurse's aides and Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN's), opening new possibilities for people in what were previously dead-end jobs. For example, Adele Butler started her career as a hospital nursing assistant, pursued LPN training, and as a union member was able to qualify for a District 1199C



scholarship to pursue her nursing degree (RN) at a local university. Today, Adele Butler is training coordinator for nursing programs at the Breslin Center.

"We do a little bit of everything," she says of the nursing programs. "Clinical training placements are an important element, because students have to be able to demonstrate the skills they have learned, and are evaluated on their performance."

Butler also runs a 16-week, full-day remediation and employment training program for welfare recipients. Some 60 students train as nurse's assistants, and another 45 as mental health/retardation technicians. The students' costs, including transportation and child-care, are paid by the state under the welfare reform law. Participants are pre-tested and assigned to reading, math, communication, and life-skills classes as necessary.

They are also introduced to the principles and practices of the health field they are preparing for, and the scope of work in entry-level positions. Topics covered in the nurse assistant curriculum include legal responsibilities and ethical standards; infection control; nutrition; patient observation skills; emergency procedures; and rehabilitation skills. During the last four weeks of the program students are placed in real workplace environments, with supervision from instructors. Students who pass this "skill performance" and their academic courses receive a diploma.

Meanwhile, hundreds of other stu-

*continued on page 5*

## Assessing Skills

*New tools are on the way to assess and certify worker skills in health care and other industries.*

*The National Skill Standards and Assessment Collaborative, directed by WestEd for the NSSB, is pilot testing assessments that address common issues in health care, human services, retail, and electronics.*

doors to non-members, including nonunion employees of companies that support the program and local unemployed residents. About 40 percent of the enrollees are outside the union.

"I don't know of another union local that operates a training program of this kind," says James Ryan, who has directed the District 1199C Training and Upgrading Fund for two decades. In 1996, the program served 10,000 people with classes and counseling services at hours convenient for parents and working people. District 1199C has 17,000 members who work in hospitals, HMO's, and other health-care agencies in the Southeastern Pennsylvania-Southern New Jersey region.

# INDIANA'S 'CAN DO' APPROACH TO SKILLS EDUCATION

*Continued  
from page 1*

added, and which the recipient can show to prospective employers.

"For many of my students, demonstrating the ability to perform real-world business tasks -- such as drafting a grammatically clean, neat memo or setting up and running a computer merge-purge program -- is the first taste of school success they've had," says Busch, a 20-year teaching veteran who has won top state awards for her own skills. "These are smart kids, but they feel like second-class citizens because they're in a vocational program."

Indiana's program to better prepare individuals for the workplace, and to document their work-related skills, is considered one of the most fully developed of any state. It began with the state legislature's 1992 Workforce Development Act, which is actively supported by Governor Frank O'Bannon. The law established a high-level Workforce Proficiency Panel (with representatives from business, labor and education), which works with state agencies to reassess Indiana's education and training efforts.

The law charged the gubernatorially-appointed panel to identify major occupational areas in which the demand for workers exceeds the supply, and to work closely with Indiana employers and workers to determine the core skills and technical knowledge that each occupation requires. The panel was also asked to foster development of proficiency-based curricula derived from existing skill standards, as well as new kinds of assessments that would enable students to demonstrate their abilities.

"Our whole process is industry-driven and voluntary," says Terry Fields, Indiana's Director of Vocational and Technical Education. "If Indiana employers and employees trust that a certificate represents high-quality skill standards, that ultimately will drive education reform."

The Workforce Proficiency Panel has won the business community's trust by involving employers and workers throughout the process of identifying key occupations, establishing core skills and proficiencies for each, and recommending performance-based teaching and student-assessment practices. More than 150 companies and hundreds of their employees have participated in the panel's standards-setting committees, and hundreds of additional firms in each of the target occupational fields have been surveyed to validate the proposed skills and proficiencies for their sector.

Where national industry standards already exist -- in bioscience, electronics, metalworking, printing, and health -- the committees used them to adjust and align their proposals. And since the standards-setting process is based on a continuous-improvement philosophy, Fields notes, Indiana's "essential skills and technical proficiencies" can be upgraded as necessary as national standards change.

So far, 29 schools and colleges have qualified as "implementation sites" offering the new program's skills-oriented coursework and performance-focused certificate examination. "Business people wanted to know how a student's proficiency level would be judged," explains Soni Jones, the assistant state

vocational director. "So we developed the concept of a 'showcase' assessment. A student being assessed is given a "scenario" -- a real or simulated workplace situation calling for specific skills -- and must demonstrate the knowledge to handle it. A sample scenario in plastics, for example, places the student in a fluid-container manufacturing firm as a quality inspector. The student must measure and inspect containers using calipers and other instruments, write the results on a statistical process control sheet, and determine whether the production process is functioning properly. The results of the scenario evaluation are placed in the student's notebook.

Consultants from the Vocational Technical Education Consortium of States (VTECS), an interstate consortium that assists the states with employment and training issues, helped create scenarios for each occupational field and validated them with employers. VTECS software helps participating Indiana teachers in working out skills-based instructional strategies and customized performance scenarios to fit the curriculum. "We provide a framework," says VTECS' Chris Olson, who works with Fields to coordinate the collaborative NSSB/Education Department/School-to-Work Office "Building Linkages" project to link with similar programs in 14 states. "States and teachers can adapt it to their needs. The focus is on what people actually do at work. Then you teach to that scenario."

Fields and Jones are now talking with business groups and employers about ways to

extend Indiana's program to incumbent workers and the unemployed, with School-to-Work leaders about broadening high-school participation, and with postsecondary institutions about awarding advanced standing to certificate holders. "We are moving slowly and deliberately on the education side," says Fields, "because we have to make sure that the quality we want is there every step of the way. But I will be disappointed if we don't have 1500 more certificate holders by the end of next year."

## SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

The NSSB thinks that skill standards are a necessary tool to meet the demands of the global marketplace. The Board acknowledges the ongoing skill standards efforts of states, businesses, unions, and associations. By integrating the Board's work with these efforts, we can all contribute to a better American future.

If you agree that a voluntary system of national skill standards will benefit this nation and its employers and workers, we ask for your support by signing the NSSB Statement of Support. The Statement is up on our web page at <http://www.nssb.org>. Download the Statement and return it to: NSSB Statement of Support, 1441 L St., NW, Suite 9000, Washington, DC 20005. Or write us or fax us (202/254-8646) to receive your Statement of Support Certificate.

## UNION'S TRAINING PROGRAMS TOUCH A WHOLE COMMUNITY *Continued from page 3*

dents are taking a variety of pre-nursing, nursing certification, and continuing education courses -- from medical terminology, computer skills, biology, and chemistry to a seminar called "Legal Survival Skills for Nurses in Management Roles." College-level courses are accredited by several Philadelphia higher-education institutions. "We periodically survey union members about their interests," Butler explains, "so we have a good idea what kinds of courses best serve their professional needs."

The Center has always offered job counseling and placement services, vitally important given the current turmoil and restructuring in the health-care field. Amid rising layoffs, in 1995 District 1199C negotiated an employer-supported, \$2-million Job Security Fund for dislocated workers. "There's a lot of fear out there right now," Fund Director Ryan says. This fall alone, two city hospitals employing a total of 850 people are closing. The fund underwrites the cost of a year of counseling, retraining, income support, and health insurance for eligible workers; similar training and job-seeking help for dislocated workers not in the union is supported by a U.S. Department of Labor grant.

## Putting Their Stamp on Metalworking

*Continued from page 2*

vanced to Level III training or beyond, Powell notes, and can set up, run, and troubleshoot their production lines without outside supervision.

The McGregors' experience has turned them into promoters of skill standards and champions of lifelong education for workers. James McGregor serves on the NIMS board, and recently participated in crafting the first national standards for metal stamping occupations.

McGregor acknowledges that he wasn't attuned to the importance of educational institutions in job

training until he turned to Clark State Community College for help in analyzing the metal stamping tasks that would underpin clear skill standards. Now he is working with both the community college and Springfield-Clark Joint Vocational School to help them modernize their metalworking equipment and curricula in cooperation with area employers. "The more we're able to support the educational programs, the better it is for everyone in the industry," he says.

OSMI's forward-looking activities have won their company The Governor's

## THE BOARD'S MISSION

The National Skill Standards Board encourages the creation and adoption of a voluntary national system of skill standards which will enhance the ability of the United States to compete effectively in a global economy. These skill standards will be developed by industry in full partnership with education, labor, and community stakeholders, and will be flexible, portable, and continuously updated and approved.

*Permission to reprint items from this newsletter is expressly granted.*

## WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

### WHY SKILL STANDARDS?

A more skilled workforce will enhance the global competitiveness of the U.S. economy, increasing the productivity and competitiveness of employers, and raising the living standards and economic security of American workers.

### WHAT ARE SKILL STANDARDS?

Skill standards specify the knowledge and competence required to successfully perform in a given occupation or field.

### WHAT WE DO, AND WHO WE ARE.

The 1994 National Skill Standards Act charged the National Skill Standards Board (NSSB) with "stimulating the development and adoption of a voluntary national system of skill standards." The 27 member Board was appointed by the President and Congress, and includes representatives of employers, workers, educators, community groups, and government.

### WHAT WE DON'T DO.

The Board itself will not set skill standards, but rather establish the guidelines used to endorse standards created by groups called "voluntary partnerships" in the 1994 law. The law requires that voluntary partnerships include employer, union, worker, community, and education and training representatives.

Workforce Excellence Award; customer service and product quality awards; and the A.R. Hedberg Training and Education Award of the Precision Metalforming Association, among other tributes. The McGregors also instituted employee profit-sharing; tuition reimbursement for job-related courses; cash bonuses linked to the quality of production

output; and awards for employees who complete a training level. "Training has been a huge investment," says McGregor, "but it enabled us to survive and face the many new opportunities we have today as a business." OSMI data show that trained workers demonstrate consistently higher productivity than had untrained workers previously.

# NATIONAL SKILL STANDARDS BOARD

## Chairman

**James R. Houghton**  
*Retired Chairman and CEO*  
Corning Incorporated

## Vice Chairs

**Bruce Carswell**  
*Former Senior Vice President*  
Human Resources & Administration,  
GTE Corporation

**Paul F. Cole**  
*Secretary-Treasurer*  
New York State AFL-CIO  
*Vice President*  
American Federation of Teachers

**William E. Weisgerber**  
*Former State Director*  
Office of Career and Technical  
Education, Michigan Department  
of Education

## Members

**George Bliss**  
*Director of Training*  
United Association of Journeymen  
and Apprentices, Plumbing and Pipe  
Fitting Industry of the United States  
and Canada

**James Burge**  
*Former Corp. Vice President & Director of  
Governmental Affairs-Human Resources*  
Motorola

**Terrance Craney**  
*President*  
Wisconsin Education  
Association Council

**William Crotty**  
*Senior Partner*  
Black, Crotty, Sims, Hubka,  
Burnett, Birch & Samuels

**Kenneth Edwards**  
*Director, Research and Technical Services*  
International Brotherhood  
of Electrical Workers

**Marcia Greenberger**  
*Founder & Co-President*  
National Women's Law Center

**Herbert J. Grover**  
*Professor of Education*  
University of Wisconsin

**Yvette Herrera**  
*Administrative Assistant to the  
President-Director of Education*  
Communications Workers of America

**Hugh B. Price**  
*President & CEO*  
National Urban League, Inc.

**Michael Riccards**  
*President*  
Fitchburg State College

**Raymond J. Robertson**  
*General Vice President & Executive  
Director, Apprenticeship & Training*  
International Association of Bridge,  
Structural & Ornamental Iron Workers

**Stephen Saylor**  
*Human Resources Manager*  
Gear for Sports International, Inc.

**Katherine Schrier**  
*District Council 37 Education  
Fund Administrator*  
American Federation of State, County  
and Municipal Employees

**John T. Smith**  
*Former Special Assistant to the  
International President & Director*  
United Steelworkers of America,  
AFL-CIO-CLC; Director, USWA  
Dislocated Workers Program

**Esteban Soriano, Ph.D.**  
*President*  
The Resource Group

**Marc S. Tucker**  
*President*  
National Center on  
Education and the Economy

**Anne-Lee Verville**  
*Retired General Manager*  
Worldwide Education Industry,  
IBM Corporation

**Carolyn Warner**  
*President*  
Corporate Education Consulting, Inc.

**Alan L. Wurtzel**  
*Vice Chairman of the Board*  
Circuit City Stores, Inc.

## Ex-Officio Members

**William M. Daley, Secretary**  
U.S. Department of Commerce

**Alexis M. Herman, Secretary**  
U.S. Department of Labor

**Richard W. Riley, Secretary**  
U.S. Department of Education

## Executive Director, NSSB

**Edie West**



# NATIONAL SKILL STANDARDS BOARD

1441 L Street, NW, Suite 9000  
Washington, D.C. 20005-3512

Phone: (202) 254-8628  
Fax: (202) 254-8646  
Web Site:  
<http://www.nssb.org>