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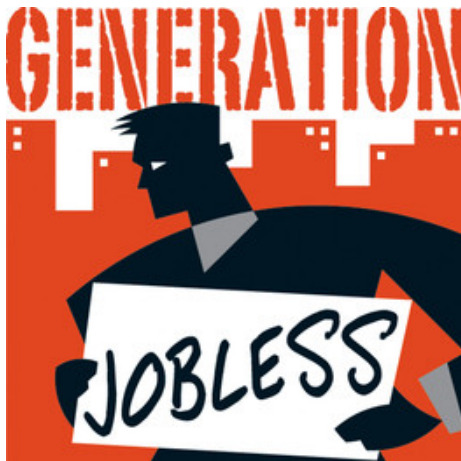
CAREERS | NOVEMBER 10, 2011, 2:40 P.M. ET

Help Wanted: Mechanics, Not Chefs

By LAUREN WEBER

The National Aviation Academy in Clearwater, Fla., graduated 235 new aircraft mechanics in June and, of those that passed their federal license exams, more than 95% are now working in the field. "There are so many jobs and there are more coming," says Angeline Capriotti, director of career services at NAA.

Yet the school has had trouble building interest among young people, despite boosting its high school recruiting team in the last two years.



Robert Pizzo

About Generation Jobless

Americans 25 and under face one of the toughest job markets in modern history. This week, The Wall Street Journal explores their stories.

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The dearth of interest among young people in many blue-collar trades — such as welding, machine production and aviation mechanics — means they're missing out on reasonably well-paid positions in fields where employment prospects are improving. Aircraft mechanics, for example, earned a median weekly wage of \$980 in 2010 or nearly \$51,000 annually, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Unemployment in manufacturing stood at 7.7% in October, down from a high of 13% in January 2010. In the mining and oil industries, the rate is 7.8%, down from a high of 16.1% in April 2009. Construction remains depressed, with an October unemployment rate of 13.7%, but even that is a vast improvement over the 27.1% high in February 2010.

By comparison, unemployment rates in professional and business services and hospitality are falling more slowly, at 10.1% versus a 12.4% high in March 2010 and 10.8% versus a 13.8% high in February 2011, respectively.

But many trade-skills positions today are "orphan jobs" — meaning they tend to be viewed as dying professions when in fact there aren't enough workers to take the spots of retiring workers — says Anthony Carnevale of Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce. "They're in industries that no one thinks are growing and no one wants to go into," he says. The bottom line is, there are many overlooked job openings in multiple trades, says Mr. Carnevale.

Ms. Capriotti and others say parents guide their children away

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Major Field	Unemployment Percent
ACCOUNTING	5.4%
ACTUARIAL SCIENCE	0.0%
ADVERTISING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS	6.1%
AEROSPACE ENGINEERING	3.6%
AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS	1.3%
AGRICULTURE PRODUCTION AND MANAGEMENT	3.0%
ANIMAL SCIENCE	6.9%

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IT. For example, Wisconsin is only projecting 90 new and replacement openings in machine tool operations and 362 openings for automotive technicians in 2015, compared with 1140 openings for office technology assistants and 775 for nursing assistants, according to the Wisconsin Technical College System.

But employers and technical-school administrators say that young people aren't entering trade programs at high enough rates to replace retiring workers or fill positions that are opening up as the economy improves, raising the risk that crucial jobs will sit empty as manufacturers and other companies see demand rise.

Mike Mallwitz's company, Busch Precision, is growing fast. The Milwaukee firm, which makes complex equipment for mining, energy and defense companies, plans to hire nine machinists next year on top of the nine added this year. He'd like to hire young people because they have a fluency with computers, a key qualification as manufacturing becomes more tech-driven, but he's having a hard time finding talent.

Mr. Mallwitz is teaming with MATC and other state organizations to cultivate interest among high school students, and says he's participated in more than six events this year, including job fairs and open houses for students and their parents.

Of course, not every young person is rejecting the trade-skills path. Michael Hennessy, 17, has been studying plumbing since his freshman year at Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical School in Upton, Mass. He learned from his "employability" class, a requirement that helps freshmen choose their career path, that journeyman plumbers can earn \$35-50 per hour, while masters can go up to \$100 per hour. Plus, he says, "everyone needs a plumber."

from vocational careers and toward four-year colleges instead, believing their job prospects will be better with a college education. And just as young people are reluctant to add debt right now to attend a four-year college, some are shying away from technical degrees because of the cost. For instance, NAA's 14-month aviation program costs \$30,500 and a 16-month automotive technician program can run \$25,000.

Dorothy Walker, interim dean at the School of Technology and Applied Sciences at the 99-year-old Milwaukee Area Technical College, says she's seeing "huge demand" for job candidates in the machinist, welding and manufacturing areas, but "we're not seeing an awful lot of young people ages 18 to 25 looking at those careers." Instead, students entering the school are gravitating to programs in information technology, healthcare, video game development and culinary arts.

Ms. Walker says MATC currently has 37 students in its machine tool program. But the school would happily add a second shift for 40 more students if the demand existed.

To be sure, trade jobs are not as plentiful as those in some of the other fields young people are pursuing, such as animation and

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