

# Making a match: Clark students and manufacturers



Mechatronics lab at Clark College

Clark College and ESD 112 are now hosting Washington's newest Center of Excellence, a hub for connecting the region's students and employers through job training and coordination. The local office is known as the Center of Excellence for Semiconductors & Electronic Manufacturing.

It's the 11th office of its type in the state. The centers were created by the state Board for Community and Technical Colleges in 2004. They're intended to serve as liaisons between local schools and industries, providing career opportunities for students and helping industries maintain skilled workforces.

"This is a great opportunity for students at Clark College," says Dr. Sandra Fowler-Hill, Interim President of Clark College. "Working strategically with our industry partners, we can help develop the talent pipeline within advanced manufacturing that will allow local manufacturers to grow and will provide outstanding opportunities for our students to succeed."

Each center is built around an industry that plays a major role in the local economy, such as a clean energy center at Centralia College and a marine manufacturing and technology center at Skagit Valley College.

The new Clark County center focuses on semiconductors and electronics, due to the presence of several big electronics companies in the area, including silicon-wafer manufacturer SEH America, a subsidiary of Tokyo-based Shin-Etsu Handotai Ltd.

“We have an electronic and semiconductor hub here in Southwest Washington that we’d like to support,” said Mohammed Maraee, the new center’s associate director. Maraee lives in Vancouver and previously worked for the Oregon Manufacturing Innovation Center and has taught business administration at Portland Community College.

The Clark County center operates under the leadership of an existing center at Everett Community College that focuses on aerospace and advanced manufacturing. It has a primary office at the main Educational Service District 112 building and a satellite office at Clark College, Maraee said.

Clark College is well positioned to support the new center, with programs like computer technology, welding, and mechatronics that provide graduates with the skills needed for today’s jobs in advanced manufacturing. The college has also announced that the first building in its future satellite location in Ridgefield, Clark College at Boschma Farms, will be dedicated to advanced manufacturing.

The new center is funded by \$300,000 allocated by the state legislature in the 2019-21 budget. Its partners include Clark College, local K-12 schools, and the Southwest Washington High Technology Council.

The council is made up of representatives from several high-tech companies that are either headquartered or have a significant presence in Clark County, including SEH America, nLIGHT, WaferTech, and Silicon Forest Electronics. The group was at the center of the legislative effort to secure funding for the new center.

The group is chaired by Ben Bagherpour, vice president of site services and government affairs at SEH America, who also serves a member of the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

“The [High Technology Council] is pleased to now have a single

point of contact that we can reach out to,” Bagherpour said in a statement. “The associate director will be our point person to understand high-tech manufacturing companies’ workforce and education needs and to work with the K-12 and higher education systems to develop and align programs to meet these needs.”

SEH America has been involved in previous local pipeline efforts aimed at addressing concerns about attracting and retaining a skilled technical workforce. Last year, the company launched a pilot program called Career Launch, offering participants paid part-time apprenticeships at SEH paired with tuition assistance for students at Clark College.

The program is expanding for the 2019-2020 school year, Bagherpour said, and will now include similar opportunities at some of the other council companies. It will also be incorporated into the new center and further developed along with future programs as the center continues to grow.

*Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley*