



File photo by Thomas Franz

Chippewa Valley hosting skilled trades fair

By: Nick Mordowanec | **Fraser - Clinton Township Chronicle** | **Published April 16, 2018**

CLINTON TOWNSHIP — The Chippewa Valley Schools College and Skilled Trades Fair returns 6-7:30 p.m. April 24 at Chippewa Valley High School, 18300 19 Mile Road, Clinton Township.

This year, for the first time, skilled trade professions and certificate programs will have representatives on hand. Both fairs will run concurrent.

Chippewa Valley High School counselor Denise Verner said that when the fair started about 15 years ago, approximately 35 colleges and universities had representation. Now, that number is at about 70. At press time, 24 skilled trades were expected to be on hand as well.

Verner and Stephanie Pitcher — also a counselor at the school — toured several skilled trade training facilities last fall, along with other administrators and educators. They talked with sheet metal workers, electricians, carpenters and bricklayers — most of whom iterated that the huge shortage in such job fields is not just a local or statewide issue, but a national one.

According to Pure Michigan Talent Connect, there are more than 8,300 skilled trades job openings across all industries, with more than 6,200 openings expected to be available each year through 2022. MichiganConstruction.com said pay varies by specific trade and experience, with salaries ranging between \$35,000 and \$75,000 for ironworkers, sheet metal workers and plumbers.

In the next seven years, 3.5 million U.S. manufacturing jobs will be available. However, the National Association of Manufacturers said that only 1.5 million of those positions are expected to be filled.

The reality is that not every student has a desire to go to a four-year college, though Verner and Pitcher always encourage some sort of post-secondary training or education — of which the majority of seniors seek.

“My only regret is that we didn’t think of it sooner,” Verner said. “I thought, ‘Boy, we really need to bring all this information to the kids and their parents, like we do with colleges.’ ... There’s this perception that it’s maybe low-paying or it’ll be in a dirty environment. It’s just not true. It’s not true at all.”

Pitcher said she and Verner wanted to make students and guardians aware of the myriad opportunities available to them. That includes working with Macomb Community College, Oakland Community College, labor unions and local businesses that offer apprenticeships.

“We’ve recently been hearing about the shortage of skilled trades, and they’re not having enough people go in these areas,” Pitcher said. “(Students and parents) get to meet the representatives and get firsthand knowledge of the

specifics, especially skilled trades and how to get involved. One of our challenges as counselors is to give information out to students because everyone has their own separate process.”

The entire fair helps a great deal, Verner said, as it allows for questions to be asked and answered in one particular location.

Pitcher said about 42 percent of Chippewa Valley seniors end up going to four-year institutions, while 29 percent pursue two-year opportunities.

“I think a lot of the time, students don’t know what they want and what the opportunities are,” Pitcher said.

The fair is open to all members of the public.