

<http://www.courant.com/opinion/op-ed/hc-op-cooper-ct-aerospace-worker-training-0101-20171230-story.html>



Gear Up For Aerospace Boom Beginning In CT



Hundreds of companies, including Pratt & Whitney, and thousands of workers will benefit from a wave of armed forces spending.
(Hartford Courant)

Jan. 1, 2017

COLIN COOPER

Connecticut's aerospace industry is about to, well, take off. And it should be flying high for years to come, having a positive, burgeoning effect on the entire Connecticut economy.

For workers with the required skills, it means job security and growth opportunities. Individuals without the necessary skills shouldn't fret, though, because there is still time to sign up for any number of training programs offered at state technical schools and colleges.

The source for the good news, of course, is [Lockheed Martin](#), United Technologies Corp. and General Dynamics. Lockheed's Sikorsky, in a deal with the state, announced it will remain in Connecticut and expand its business here. Also aided by a tax deal with the state, UTC's Pratt & Whitney is sharply increasing production, hiring 8,000 people to handle a roughly \$1 trillion order backlog.

Add to that the General Dynamics expansion of its Electric Boat Division, with forecast spending of \$1.5 billion in Groton (and across the border in Rhode Island) to tackle construction of huge new submarines. Thousands of new workers will be hired in the process. In addition, strong demand for GE's next-generation commercial jet engine is driving business for the dozens of Connecticut-based suppliers that support GE's aircraft engine manufacturing.

At least some of this growth in Connecticut is evidence of the effectiveness of state tax incentives. Just about every state in America these days is offering a host of incentives to lure companies to their jurisdictions. To compete nationally, and internationally, these incentives are necessary and a fact of life. Even in rural Eastford, our company, Whitcraft, gets calls just about every week with aggressive proposals to entice the company to pack up and move out of Connecticut.

But Whitcraft, a supplier of a variety of highly engineered aircraft components, is not moving. The company is expanding here, despite the offers from other states.

Like so many of the scores of other companies throughout Connecticut that supply the major aerospace and defense behemoths, remaining in Connecticut

is critical. Yes, high costs and the overall climate for business in Connecticut create significant headwinds for companies like ours that compete in a global market, but we believe Connecticut has the most skilled and knowledgeable aerospace technicians and engineers in the world. And the state-run programs that train and supply that workforce are top-notch.

These training programs, however, clearly need to be expanded as the market for skilled aerospace workers grows tighter. Let's make sure the aerospace industry can continue to hire Connecticut residents and not be forced to import them from other states.

For Whitcraft, in particular, the Pratt & Whitney backlog will continue to be a major driver of growth — growth that already has begun in leaps and bounds. From discussions with peers, I know many other aerospace and submarine subcontractors are experiencing the same pressures.

Whitcraft already has added engineers and production personnel — from Ellis and Cheney Technical high schools, from Manchester and Quinnebog Valley community colleges, and from our state universities, including Central Connecticut State University and UConn. In addition, we run our own in-house training and apprenticeship programs, expanding the skill of our incumbent workforce. Still, we need to hire more; in fact we have more than a dozen job openings right now across our three Connecticut facilities and we fully expect more openings down the road.

In addition to state efforts to support Connecticut's technical schools at the secondary school level and at the community college and college levels, training for new workers must be ramped up to meet the increased demand, especially as highly skilled older workers begin to retire and must be replaced.

The best way to support the flight of our state's aerospace industry is to give Connecticut workers all the skills, knowledge and abilities they'll need to be

competitive in a worldwide market while keeping their feet planted in our state.

Colin Cooper is the CEO of Eastford-based Whitcraft Group.

Copyright © 2017, [Hartford Courant](#)