

Arkansas Department of Commerce's Office of Skills Development awards \$1.2 million grant to launch Steelmaking Bootcamp in Mississippi County

Press release

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Little Rock, Ark. (August 7, 2023) – A \$1.2 million grant from the Arkansas Office of Skills Development (OSD) to Arkansas Northeastern College (ANC) is helping to create the Arkansas Steelmaking Bootcamp. The bootcamp, a job skills initiative projected to train 500 individuals in its first year, is designed to meet the demand for skilled workers for the growing steelmaking industry in northeast Arkansas.

Mississippi County in northeast Arkansas has become a significant steelmaking hub. Companies like Big River Steel/U.S. Steel, Nucor-Yamato Steel, Nucor Steel Arkansas, Highbar Steel, Tenaris, Majestic Steel USA, Lexicon, Atlas Tube, Arkansas Steel Processing, Ratner Steel, SMS Milcraft, Primetals, and others are either expanding current operations or constructing new plants.

“The steel industry in northeast Arkansas is rapidly growing, and ensuring that there is a strong pipeline of talented workers is vital for the industry’s continued growth,” said Secretary of Commerce Hugh McDonald. “The Arkansas Steelmaking Bootcamp is a prime demonstration of how government, industry, and educational partners in our state can work together to solve workforce development challenges that will set Arkansas up for success in the years to come.”

The bootcamp provides entry-level knowledge for those entering the steelmaking industry. Graduates of the two-week, 80-hour bootcamp receive an OSHA-10 General Industry Certification, first aid/CPR certification, and a certificate of program completion. Grant monies will support instructor and support staff salaries, training fees and instructional materials, and marketing expenses.

“This grant represents the state’s support of the expansion of the steel industry in northeast Arkansas and the need for a strong workforce in the region,” said Cody Waits, OSD director.

“Creating an efficient and effective training program benefits the companies that have chosen to invest here and individuals looking for an in-demand, high-wage career.”

Each bootcamp can accommodate 25 participants in a cycle. The first-year, ANC will offer 20 cohorts and partner with other colleges like Black River Technical College, East Arkansas Community College, Arkansas State University-Newport, and Arkansas State University Mid-South to offer another 22.

ANC President Dr. Christopher Heigle is excited about this new initiative and proud of the partnerships forged to meet the needs of his service area. “This tremendous opportunity afforded to us through the Arkansas Department of Commerce’s Office of Skills Development, has made it possible for Arkansas Northeastern College to greatly expand what we do to help meet the needs of our steel industry and its anticipated growth over the next few years,” said Heigle. “We have wonderful relationships with our sister institutions, and their support in joining in this effort will allow us all to apply our skills and abilities to offer the steelmaking bootcamp throughout all of northeast Arkansas. This initiative will provide our steel industry with a far-greater pool of prepared job applicants, illustrating a truly regional approach to workforce and economic development.”

Arkansas Northeastern College has been providing training for the steel industry for more than 25 years, including offering a two-year degree in Steel Industry Technology. The sharing of this experience and expertise coupled with the financial support of the Office of Skills Development, gives the steelmaking bootcamp less hurdles to overcome in bringing qualified workers to area industry.

“Great things happen when people work together and put positive energy into the greater good. The steelmaking bootcamp initiative is an example of just that,” said Heigle. “This is a win-win for everyone, but mostly for the communities we serve. I am proud to be a part of something so big that will benefit so many. Our industrial partners are very important to the viability of our communities, and we will always work to provide them the training they need.”

ANC is taking applications for the first cohort in the fall 2023. More information can be found on the ANC website: <https://www.anc.edu/steeltech/>.

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