



Opportunity Knocks

DETEX Corporation successfully secures funding for its apprenticeship program to improve its workforce

By Michelle Te, Managing Editor, IPC Community

IPC member DETEX Corporation of New Braunfels, Texas, like so many other companies, strives to cultivate a highly skilled workforce to meet the growing demand for electronics assembly professionals.

But also like many companies, DETEX, which engineers and manufactures security products, has struggled to hire qualified workers. Most employees are hired without certification or experience. Providing on-the-job training (OJT) without technical instruction has been met with limited success.

So, when DETEX Human Resources Manager Martha Rodriguez was introduced to Coren Blaylock, IPC director of workforce partnerships, she quickly saw the potential and value of participating in an apprenticeship model that would

provide an opportunity to upskill their employees onsite with little downtime.

Once the company adopted an apprenticeship model, Victoria Hawkins, IPC director of workforce grants and proposals, assisted DETEX in applying for and receiving \$375 per apprentice, totaling \$7,500 for their 20 apprentices and \$10,000 for technical instruction. This spring, they were awaiting an award of \$180,000 from the Texas Workforce Commission to pay for translation services, supplies, and CIT training.

“Victoria’s patience and expertise were crucial in my ability to complete the grant application in a timely manner to initiate our onsite apprenticeship program in early March 2024,” Martha says. “Victoria provided a detailed outline of the apprenticeship program and funding require-

ments and provided the required forms and step-by-step guidance. Her support was pivotal in completing the funding application, as I had not applied for this type of funding or apprentice program.”

In this interview, Martha explains DETEX’s involvement in the Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP), specifically tailored for the electronics assembler occupation.

How has participating in the apprenticeship program helped DETEX achieve its business goals?



Martha Rodriguez: We want to reduce the ongoing recruiting challenges as we compete with other employers seeking qualified assemblers from the same talent pool. RAP caters to the needs of the burgeoning manufacturing sector in the region, specifically the growth of DETEX. We hope to address our demand for skilled electronics assemblers by participating in this crucial initiative.

How does the program benefit both the company and the employee?

With the onsite apprenticeship program, we anticipate being able to upskill our current workforce expeditiously, properly train new hires, and increase their skill set, which will increase their compensation and our retention rates.

Accordingly, the apprenticeship program outlines a career progression to empower current and future employees to undergo self-paced OJT geared toward professional development that enhances employee advancement opportunities, which allows employees to control their own career progression. It also results in economic stability and supports company retention efforts, and our ability to grow an internal certified soldering talent pipeline.

How do you plan to use the funding awards for training?

We have partnerships with Texas State Technical College (TSTC), our local chamber of commerce, and local workforce development agencies to deploy IPC’s comprehensive electronics assembler apprenticeship curriculum, which is tailored to DETEX’s employee needs.

Our employees and local job seekers are offered training that encompasses theoretical instruction and OJT, ensuring apprentices acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to excel in the field.

Funding available through IPC will offset related technical instruction (RTI) costs. This training, coupled with on-the-job mentors and a pay increase thereafter, should reduce our turnover and enable us to run our business more efficiently.

What certifications can apprentices earn?

Apprentices gain two industry-recognized credentials: IPC soldering certification and a journey-worker certification issued by the U.S. Department of Labor. They do not have to incur external tuition costs that may infringe on their finances and work/life balance.

By investing in our employees, this program supports employee advancement, company succession planning, and DETEX’s commitment to being recognized as the employer of choice in the area.



What is the makeup of your apprenticeship program?

We enrolled 27 apprentices to begin training in early March; 20 completed Level 1 online training, and their OJT is ongoing in production areas. We anticipate adding another 20 employees in Q3 or Q4 this year.

Our workforce largely consists of women, and many are older than 40 years of age. We have a mixture of ethnicities.

Do you work with local high schools to develop a talent pipeline?

Yes. We partner with the two local high schools so that students interested in manufacturing can succeed upon graduation. The high schools currently have students taking classes in manufacturing and are exploring pre-apprenticeship training to support our needs.

Each high school has voiced interest in sending a Career Technical Education (CTE) teacher to receive CIT training, which would support their Manufacturing, Industrial Technology Maintenance (IMT) and Electrical Systems Industry Based Certification pathways, as soldering is one of the components in the certification.

The program would strengthen the high schools' CCMR requirements and support students seeking employment in manufacturing. Students could potentially earn their certification and, upon graduation, be eligible for employment.

How important has this experience been for DETEX?

As the DETEX human resources manager, I believe identifying and partnering with organizations supporting employee development and recruitment is critical to our continued growth and success.

In addition to our partnerships with IPC, TSTC, and the New Braunfels' director of workforce and industry through our chamber of commerce, we partner with the local Texas Workforce Commission, which coordinates educational training



DETEX specializes in designing, engineering and manufacturing security products, including security door devices for retail, hospitals, and schools and turnstiles for airports. They make components that are part of the final assembly and have started making circuit boards internally instead of outsourcing.

and hiring efforts between DETEX and individuals who are interested in taking classes in manufacturing and want to work in the industry. They assist us with developing a pipeline of qualified new hires in our industry.

What do these partnerships provide?

Each partnership provides unique support in our efforts to complete the apprentice program, as we will need to have two to three Certified IPC Trainers (CITs) so that the apprentices can earn their certification.

IPC can offer this training and local organizations in New Braunfels rather than traveling to a training center in Dallas, which would be more expensive and difficult for the number of employees entering the apprenticeship program.

TSTC has identified the need to have two of its instructors become CITs to certify students while in school. This further supports having CITs in our area and fully trained students and/or employees.

DETEX looks forward to our continued collaboration with these organizations as they are fully engaged in the community and building a pipeline for local workforce needs. 🌈