

AWB Institute Spreads its Wings

JASON HAGEY

Grant Gilmore, the new executive director of the AWB Institute, has an agenda aimed at moving the Institute beyond its role as a business liaison to the state's higher education boards. It includes making the Institute the go-to organization for business and state leaders looking to improve the quality of Washington's workforce—and increasing the number of manufacturing jobs in the state.

Since its founding in 2001, the AWB Institute has had a big name and a narrow focus. Formally known as the Institute for Workforce Development and Sustainability, it has mainly helped to bridge the gap between the state's business community and various workforce development programs.



Now, eight years later, the staff size and mission are growing.

Grant Gilmore was recently hired as the new executive director of the nonprofit known more commonly as the AWB Institute.

Gilmore, who comes to the Institute directly from the manufacturing sector, will help expand the mission of the Institute to include a greater focus on Washington's manufacturing employment base.

Dick Walter, AWB's vice president of operations, said the changes came after AWB's

leaders evaluated the work that the Institute was doing.

Although AWB and the Institute enjoyed good relationships with the state's manufacturers, Walter said they realized that the Institute did not have the capacity to act as the state's manufacturing association—to be the “voice of the manufacturer.”

“We needed to sharpen our focus on this particular part of the economy,” he said.

TAKING THE LEAD

The AWB Institute is ramping up its focus on manufacturing in a variety of ways, from adding new tools on its Web site to reaching out more to the business community.

The Institute will soon unveil a comprehensive state directory of manufacturing companies, for example. And it will seek to use its unique position to bring together the state's resources for easier access.

One of the biggest changes will be looking for ways to move beyond an advisory role and take the initiative in pulling together existing resources for the state's business community.

AT A GLANCE

The AWB Institute, founded in 2001 by the Association of Washington Business, has served as a business liaison to the state's workforce development system.

After a recent evaluation, AWB's leaders concluded the Institute needed an increased emphasis on the state's manufacturing sector.

Competition for manufacturing jobs is intense, but Washington has a number of strengths that should help it add jobs in the coming years.

Some other things to watch for:

- **Green Jobs:** The AWB Institute will help Washington foster the kind of innovation that's needed to create new clean technology and ultimately to create a new sector of the economy.
- **Data:** The state's colleges hold vast amounts of information from studies that aren't widely available. The AWB Institute will be working with higher education to formulate new strategies and implement new tools allowing this information to become more accessible to the business community.
- **Partnering Organizations:** The AWB Institute will become a portal for the business community, nonprofits and state-run organizations allowing for a better understanding of the many resources available to enhance the workforce and further develop our economic strategies.
- **Podcasts:** The Institute has begun producing a series of podcasts featuring interviews with leaders from the state's manufacturing and workforce development communities.
- **Workforce and Training Broker:** The Institute will act as a broker between state organizations, educational institutions and businesses to help streamline efforts to get workers into jobs and training programs.
- **Workforce Readiness Initiative:** The Institute is launching a workforce readiness initiative that includes a soft skills assessment system. The system will provide employers with pre-qualified job candidates who can meet or exceed soft-skill standards. Soft skills include things such as problem solving, productive work habits and attitudes and good communication.

SPOTLIGHT ON MANUFACTURING

Manufacturing was in the news last year as Boeing considered—and ultimately chose—South Carolina over Everett as the site for its second 787 assembly line.

The decision was a disappointment for Washington leaders, and it underscored what many already knew: competition for manufacturing jobs is intense in the new global economy.

Still, Washington has many advantages when it comes to attracting and retaining manufacturing jobs and Gilmore is optimistic about the state's future.

"Manufacturing is vital to the state, and it's always going to be a prominent sector for us," he said.

In fact, Gilmore and others anticipate that Washington will gain manufacturing jobs in the coming years.

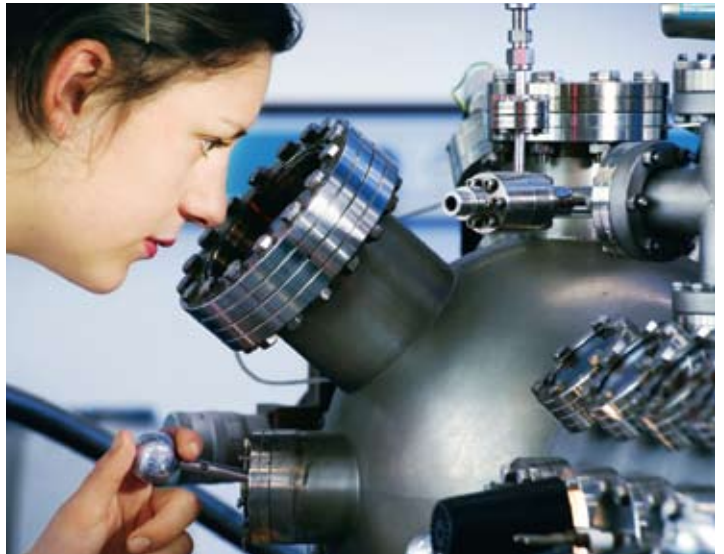
Washington's workforce is among the most talented and

highly-skilled in the nation, not only in aerospace but also marine technology and material science, he said.

The state has an array of other business advantages, including an abundance of natural resources, close proximity to several deep water ports—all valuable assets for the manufacturing sector.

"Many products sold around the world will be produced and assembled here," Gilmore said.

"It's essential that we pull together as a state and develop a unified voice. This will allow us to create an environment that helps stimulate growth within the industry as well as marketing ourselves in an effective manner on a global scale," he said. "The



"We need to know what businesses need from higher education."
—Jim Crabbe, director of workforce training, Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

AWB Institute is positioned better than ever to really showcase our state's ability."

STAKEHOLDERS ON BOARD

Public and private-sector organizations alike are welcoming AWB's new direction.

The state has a good workforce training system, but the link between the institutions and the business community needs to be strengthened, said Daniel Malarkey, deputy director of the state's recently renamed Department of Commerce.

Gilmore is well-positioned to do that, he said, because of his background in manufacturing and his knowledge of the state's employer base.

"He can bridge some of the gaps that exist."

Jim Crabbe, director of workforce training for the state Board for Community and Technical Colleges, said the AWB

Institute has done a good job of recruiting members to serve on the myriad professional and technical school boards.

Going forward, Crabbe believes the Institute can help the state collaborate more with businesses. For example, some of the equipment needed for college training programs can be costly, Crabbe said.

It might be possible, he said, to work with the private sector to provide it. That in turn can help businesses by increasing the number of trained workers available.

“We need to know what businesses need from higher education,” Crabbe said.

Rosemary Brester, president of Hobart Machined Products, has served on the board of the AWB Institute since its founding.

As the president of a company that manufactures precision products for the aerospace and medical industries, Brester is keenly aware of the challenges of finding skilled workers.

Potential workers often lack even the so-called “soft skills”—such as getting to work on time, dressing appropriately and using proper grammar, said Brester.

The Institute’s Workforce Readiness Initiative—which includes the state’s first soft-skills assessment—is aimed specifically at that issue.

Unlike some, Brester did not view Boeing’s decision to build a second 787 assembly line in South Carolina as an ominous sign for Washington’s future as a manufacturing state.

“From my perspective, as someone who has been in the industry 30-plus years, it’s just a normal part of growth for the industry.”

Still, Brester said there is plenty the state could do to improve the business environment for manufacturing companies, particularly new companies. There are a relatively high number of start-ups in Washington, which is good, but the failure rate is still far too high, she said.

AWB Institute:
www.awbinstitute.org

Hobart Machined Products:
www.hobartmachined.com

Washington State Board for
 Community and Technical Colleges:
www.sbctc.ctc.edu/

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