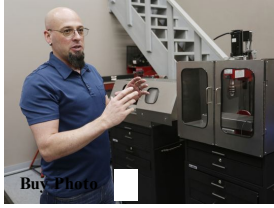


Lafayette man creates machine to fill skills gap

Chris Morisse Vizza, cvizza@jconline.com 11:25 p.m. EST February 8, 2015



(Photo: John Terhune/Journal & Courier)

Larry Fultz has invented two machines to solve a future problem.

A large share of the nation's skilled machinists are approaching retirement, and high schools stopped teaching machining skills years ago, he said.

But consumers and companies still need unique parts to run equipment and build products.

So the owner of Cutting Edge Industrial Technologies in Lafayette built prototypes of a tabletop CNC milling machine and a tabletop lathe that can be used to train novices.

"It's the factory machine scaled down to fit on a tool cart," Fultz said. "It runs on 120 volts, so it's mobile and you can just plug it in and it's ready to go.

"It can cut steel, aluminum, titanium. Anything that can go through a large milling machine."

His goal is to build 10 more machines and start shopping them around to area schools by summer. He's also developing curriculum manuals for teachers and students based on courses created by the National Institute for Metal Working Skills.

Fultz is onto something, Purdue University associate professor of engineering technology Shirl Donaldson said.

Prior to earning her doctorate degree, Donaldson ran a machining business in Lafayette with her late husband, Claude.

Large-scale machine training has a very expensive learning curve if a worker puts a piece of metal in the wrong way, she said.

"We had a guy put a part in backward, and it wrecked the machine," she said. "It cost \$30,000 to replace major parts, and we lost production time.

"If they make a mistake on Larry's equipment, it's a quick and affordable repair."

The portable machines could make a big difference at Warren County Learning Center in Williamsport, director Lisa Cruea said.

"It would be cost-prohibitive for us to set up CNC training machines," she said. But having access to portable equipment would help, she added.

Fultz said he's invested about \$40,000 in the equipment plus \$60,000 in tools and labor. He's looking for investors, but said he'll make more prototypes no matter what.

He's already offered to provide prototypes to MatchBOX Coworking Studio in Lafayette.

"It's my way of giving back to the next generation of people who are coming up," he said.

"Fortunately, I have a shop where I can just come in and make something."

Read or Share this story: <http://on.jconline.com/1DRtdzF>