
Industry short on workers
By Sherri Buri McDonald
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One brake on Oregon Medical Laboratories' growth is a national shortage of workers specially trained to handle patient specimens and conduct lab tests.

OML currently has eight openings for medical laboratory technicians and medical technologists. Medical laboratory technicians typically are graduates of a two-year associate's degree program, whereas medical technologists have completed four years of college and a one-year internship. No local colleges or universities offer these programs; the nearest are in Portland.

Anticipating the toll this labor shortage would take on its business, OML collaborated with the Lane Workforce Partnership three years ago to launch a distance learning program for medical technologists and medical laboratory technicians.

Lane County also pitched in about \$130,000 in lottery money earmarked for economic development.

The first students in the distance-learning program were OML employees, and OML offered them part-time hours and help with tuition. Last year, the program produced its first four graduates, and more students are in the pipeline.

But the ultimate winners of the program are the graduates, who can see their wages nearly double after earning a degree in medical technology, Foust said.

Last month, Rachelle Steinhauer, a 30-year-old Springfield resident, received a degree in medical technology through a distance-learning program with Medical College of Georgia. She said she had a bachelor's degree in biology from Oregon State University, but wasn't necessarily using that education as a specimen handler and later as a lab technician at OML.

Now, as a medical technologist her earnings and career potential are vastly improved.

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