

B. Braun trains its next leaders through apprenticeship program



On Monday, state Department of Labor & Industry Deputy Secretary for Workforce Development Eileen Cipriani continued the "Jobs that Pay" tour and announced a new apprenticeship training program at B. Braun Medical Inc. in Hanover Township, Lehigh County, as part of National Apprenticeship Week. Members of the press were invited to join Deputy Secretary Cipriani on a tour of the facility, which included the machine shop, the extrusion department and the Introcan Safety® IV catheter production line.



By **Jon Harris**
Of The Morning Call

NOVEMBER 13, 2017, 6:50 PM

Nathan Snyder was transitioning from a first- to second-level apprentice at B. Braun Medical Inc.'s manufacturing facility in Hanover Township, Lehigh County, when he got an invitation to visit Germany, where the 10th-largest medical device maker has its global headquarters.

For six months, Snyder learned about the company's processes — B. Braun's operations there use more CNC machining, he says — and even picked up a little German. He returned to the Lehigh Valley in June, and he's now a Level 3 apprentice at B. Braun in the mold repair and machining services shop with aspirations to continue to rise up the ladder at one of the Lehigh Valley's largest employers.

Oh yeah, one other thing: The Lehigh Career & Technical Institute product who started learning and working at B. Braun before most of his peers were even moved into their freshman dorms is only 21 years old.

“High schoolers need to realize that there is a valuable career right in front of them, and the stigma behind a technical school — that it’s bad or whatever — isn’t really there,” Snyder said. “If you’re willing to go in and work and put in the time, you can come out with a very successful career at the end of that.”

That’s exactly the message relayed Monday, when state and local officials visited B. Braun’s plant to announce the approval of the company’s apprenticeship training program. The visit kicked off National Apprenticeship Week, which runs through Sunday, and also was the latest stop on the state’s Jobs that Pay tour, an effort to promote good-paying jobs across Pennsylvania and to listen to employers regarding their workforce needs.

The tour started with a visit to the machining shop, where Eileen Cipriani, deputy secretary for workforce development at the state’s Department of Labor & Industry, was one of the people who met Snyder and six others who are earning while they learn at B. Braun. After seeing the rest of the plant, including the Introcan Safety IV catheter production line that is a three-shift operation running five days a week, the group participated in a lively discussion regarding the skills gap in manufacturing.

Among the ideas that were discussed on how to close the gap: a change in how school superintendents are measured, straying away from evaluations that pin success on how many students are accepted into college. It’s something that would be a culture change, officials agreed.

Cipriani said there are enough people available for jobs at companies such as B. Braun, but their skills are not properly aligned with what manufacturers need. A realignment of skills and pathways needs to occur, so more people can take advantage of a manufacturing career, where the average salary in Pennsylvania is \$60,000 a year, she said.

“That’s why we’re spending so much time on these apprenticeship programs,” said Cipriani, also pointing to the establishment of the state’s Apprenticeship and Training Office last year to support and expand apprenticeships. Programs registered through the office provide employer training to build a skilled workforce and help reduce turnover. The office offers apprenticeship program grants, though this year’s grant funding has been exhausted, its website states.

Properly aligning labor with the needs of employers is an issue across the country. According to the most recent Talent Shortage Survey, released last year by ManpowerGroup, 46 percent of U.S. employers surveyed reported difficulties filling jobs, up from 32 percent in 2015. As a result, ManpowerGroup found, 48 percent of U.S. employers said they are training and developing their own people to fill talent gaps — something known as upskilling.

A skilled labor shortage is also something the Lehigh Valley is grappling with, especially in the manufacturing sector. A lack of qualified workers was cited by 48 middle-market manufacturers in the Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton metropolitan area as the top barrier to business growth in 2017, according to [survey results released in October](#) by Kreischer Miller, an accounting, tax and business advisory firm serving the Lehigh Valley and Philadelphia area.

B. Braun is one company that has a need for qualified workers now and, potentially, many more in the future.

Rex Boland, vice president and general manager of B. Braun's manufacturing plant in Hanover, said the facility, which has about 1,200 workers, has around 30 jobs open. In addition, construction is ongoing in one portion of the building in Lehigh Valley Industrial Park III, though B. Braun officials are not yet disclosing how much space — or how many workers — will be added.

Boland did, however, say the company sees a “long-range future” in the area with “significant increases in our workforce here.”

That means B. Braun’s payroll of about 2,000 employees in the Lehigh Valley — spread across its manufacturing plant, U.S. headquarters in Bethlehem and a distribution center on Boulder Drive in Breinigsville — could eventually get even larger.

And now, with a registered apprenticeship program, Boland is hopeful the designation furthers the credibility of B. Braun’s efforts to train its next leaders and attracts more people such as Snyder to enter the manufacturing field.

“I know we’re a great company to work for, and we need great people to come here,” Boland said.

As for Snyder, he plans to pursue a degree in mechanical engineering or maybe a business management degree to further advance his career at B. Braun.

It’s too early to say where he’ll end up. But Boland, who started his career on the production floor and is a 35-year veteran of the industry, has his own expectations.

“You could do my job one day,” he told Snyder on Monday.

Profile: B. Braun Medical Inc.

A brief look at B. Braun, the 10th-largest medical device company in the world.

Headquarters: Global headquarters in Germany; U.S. headquarters in Bethlehem

Employees: 56,000 worldwide, 6,000 of whom are in North America

Annual revenue: \$7 billion worldwide, including \$1.6 billion in North America

Local presence: About 2,000 employees across its Bethlehem headquarters, Breinigsville distribution center and Hanover Township manufacturing plant

jon.harris@mcall.com

Twitter [@ByJonHarris](https://twitter.com/ByJonHarris)

610-820-6779

Get the inside scoop on the Lehigh Valley's business scene on [The Business Cycle:](http://TheBusinessCycle.com)

themorningcall.com/business

Like on Facebook: [facebook.com/LVBizCycle](https://www.facebook.com/LVBizCycle)

Follow on Twitter: [@LVBizCycle](https://twitter.com/LVBizCycle)

Copyright © 2017, Lehigh Valley Business Cycle