



Drawing on the Past, Pushing Toward the Future!

The way Danielle Chaisson made her living was not what she had envisioned or studied in college, but bills and loans do not pay themselves. Danielle spent over seven years in retail and climbed her way to management positions but never really felt that it was where she belonged. She approached whatever job she had with a great attitude and the desire to succeed but her passion, and her degree, were in graphic design and she yearned for a career that would allow her to use some of those skills.

Danielle is lucky. When she spoke about wanting to make a change, her husband Andy was supportive and encouraged her to take a chance. Andy was also the one who initially brought up CNC (computer numerical control) machining. Danielle began researching and found the idea of creating parts on machines controlled by computer programs very appealing. She made an appointment with the Greater Merrimack Valley Career Center (Lawrence, MA) and, ironically, her case manager handed her a flier about an upcoming information session about the Accelerated CNC Skills Training that MassMEP was holding in a few days. He



emphasized that CNC machining is a great career path with lots of demand. Danielle attended the info session, passed the basic math and English aptitude tests, filled out the paperwork, and earned a seat in the program. She remembers thinking, “Wow, I am really doing this!”

Accelerated CNC Skills Training classes are held in the Maker Space at UMass Lowell and utilize MassMEP and UMass Lowell instructors and the college’s machine shop. Danielle quickly became “Den Mother” to the rest of the class, reinforcing the importance of priorities, accountability, and time management to the younger students as she interjected praise and encouragement. As predicted, the computer aspect of the Accelerated CNC Skills Training came easily for Danielle while the machine operation presented more challenges. She kept pushing herself and successfully completed the program. On the day of the job fair, Danielle was at ease and



confident during her interviews and received several job offers. V.H. Blackinton, the largest manufacturer of police, fire, military, security, and government badges in the United States, was her employer of choice.

After her first day on the job, Danielle shared, "I am learning to design tool paths for the CNC machines with ArtCAM and will be working with several people in the company to help with various design tasks. It is so exciting because it melds my graphic design background with everything I just learned from the CNC class!"

Six months later, her excitement has only grown. "I thoroughly enjoy working at V.H. Blackinton," shared Danielle. "My supervisor, Jason, is the kind of boss you only dream about, and my co-workers are hilarious! I fit right in!" Jason says that Danielle has made a big impact working in the Tool Room and has taken on many roles inside and outside the department. "I'm so proud to have her on my team," he stated. "In just a short time after she started working with our ArtCAM software, Danielle was pulling her first badge die out of the machine. She also shows great leadership and works very well with all her co-workers."

Danielle wears many hats in her new role. Though her actual title is CAD programmer, she designs toolpaths for the CNC machines while providing back up to the lead designer and working closely with the sales team. "I've designed several badges and seals that were approved for production and have already been shipped to the customers. I am also very involved with designing and printing FlexBadges, a flexible metallic looking alternative to traditional metal badges."

Danielle has participated on a team doing continuous improvement activities around the company. They have scheduled Kaizen rapid improvement events to help redesign an area of the facility so that two departments who share resources can be located next to each other. She explains that MassMEP project Manager Rick Budlong has facilitated meetings to help them create their action plan. Danielle has also been included in product development meetings at Blackinton. "I have been able to apply some of the managerial skills that I learned working in retail to my current job," she adds excitedly, "and I've heard that the IT department has been asking questions about my IT knowledge, too!"

"If you asked me a year ago, I never would have thought that soon I would be working at a job I love! When things got tough," she shares, "the MassMEP Program was there to lift me up and give me new skills to help change my life around." She credits everyone who worked with her, whether it was someone from MassMEP, another student or a UMass Lowell Instructor, with changing her life for the better. "I no longer drag my feet going to a job that I feel 'stuck' in. It's great to be utilizing my new CNC abilities and *finally* using the skills and knowledge that I acquired through my college degree."



David Long, Blackinton COO, confirmed that the company is just as delighted with their choice of Danielle as she is with them. Her manager Bryan says that Danielle has been a really great fit, personality-wise, talent-wise and in all aspects. “Her skill set really complemented what we already had,” he shared. “She makes the technology area of our company stronger.” Bryan also feels that the process of meeting and interviewing Danielle through the MassMEP’s Job Fair was very simple and could not have worked out better.

“Honestly, this has been life changing for me,” says Danielle. “I love my new job and am excited for the future. I honestly would not have found this job without the help of everyone at MassMEP. The program allowed me to make a career change without paying for school or adding to my student loan debt. I am extremely grateful.”

Please visit V.H. Blackinton at www.blackinton.com for more information and videos.

To learn about MassMEP’s Accelerated CNC Skills Training contact Lisa Oden at lisao@massmep.org.