

# Missouri Counties Race for 'Work Ready' Status

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**M**issouri has been one of the most

active states in championing the importance of Certified Work Ready Communities (CWRC) since the status was first awarded by college testing and credentialing provider American College Testing (ACT) in 2013 — to Jasper County, Missouri. The Show Me State was one of four states selected in 2012 to participate in the CWRC initiative. The purpose is to align workforce training programs with the economic development needs of communities, matching the appropriate applicants to jobs based on skill level and giving businesses a more quantifiable workforce assessment tool with which to evaluate local labor pools.

Since March 2016, 10 new Missouri counties are Certified Work Ready Communities — Vernon, Barry, Chariton, Maries, Barton, Washington, Howell, Madison, Dunklin and Lawrence, bringing the number of fully certified counties to 34. Forty-four other counties in the state are actively seeking the certification. Does CWRC status really matter to employers?

“To stay competitive today and in the future requires talented and engaged employees who think like business owners and drive continuous improvement,” said Steve Miller, plant manager of Kingsford Manufacturing, on March 18th, when Maries County, south of Jefferson City, in south central Missouri, was certified. “Through the Missouri Career Center and the Work Keys testing program [for earning National Career Readiness Certificates], we’ve been able to find people with the right skills who can help us continue to be a successful operation, great place to work and a strong community partner.”

Many other supporters, such as Brewer Science, a company that develops and manufactures innovative materials, processes and equipment for the microelectronics and related industries, also consider the NCRC when hiring. More than 3,100 Missouri businesses recognize the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate in support of Work Ready Communities goals.

## Investment in the Future

“Missouri was one of the inaugural states to engage in the ACT Work Ready Communities initiative,” confirms Debra Lyons, ACT’s senior director, Center for Workforce

Advancement, noting the program is housed in the state economic development department. “They have dedicated and dynamic leadership that supports their initiative, and their economic development department provides communication tools and resources to counties.”

Companies looking for a central US location will find in Missouri a well-established workforce development ecosystem relative to states whose counties have not invested the time and resources in certifying Work Ready Communities to the same extent.

“The long-term benefit to Missouri is their community partnerships being built and sustained,” Lyons explains. “They have built an effective network of employers supporting this effort — currently leading the country in the number of employers recognizing or recommending the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate. By helping to leverage Work Ready Communities to help with employer retention efforts, they position themselves for business recruitment and expansion opportunities.” ▼

## SHOW ME THE PROJECTS

**B**rodrene Hartmann, a Danish food packaging manufacturer, broke ground June 2nd on a \$30-million facility in Rolla — its first facility in the US. The company will soon create dozens of new jobs in the area. The facility will produce sustainably made, molded-fiber egg cartons for the US market made of 100-percent recycled newspaper sourced from the Midwest and distributed nationally.

“The central location with improved transportation access from the I-44 corridor and intermodal rail connections in St. Louis and Kansas City will allow us to quickly connect with our customers across the country,” said Gerry Lavis, president of Hartmann North America. “Here, we have found an excellent regional manufacturing workforce and a competitive business climate overall, which factored into the final decision to locate to Rolla.”

**CertainTeed Corporation's** \$100-million manufacturing and distribution center expansion in Jonesburg was completed in early June. It includes construction of a 60,000-sq.-ft. (5,574-sq.-m.) manufacturing facility and 150,000-sq.-ft. (13,900-sq.-m.) warehouse, serving as the production and distribution site for the company's Landmark™ residential roofing shingles. The production and distribution center is expected to employ 100 workers, along with an estimated 400 ancillary local jobs created in trucking, welding and maintenance services. CertainTeed is a wholly owned subsidiary of Compagnie de Saint-Gobain SA of France.

The Jonesburg plant will be the company's second plant in Missouri, with the other being a roofing granule production facility in Gads Hill. Saint-Gobain operates an additional six building materials distribution and glass bottling facilities in the state.

**Varsity Tutors**, a live learning online platform that connects students and professionals with personalized

instruction, is expanding in Clayton, a St. Louis suburb, with a new, 20,000-sq.-ft. (2,320-sq.-m.) facility. The business was launched by Washington University entrepreneur Chuck Cohn in 2007. The company's expansion, which will create 150 jobs, is associated with a more than \$5-million investment, which includes lease payments, facility build-out and equipment costs.

“We're incredibly proud that Varsity Tutors represents the largest-ever venture capital funding round for a Missouri-founded Internet company,” said Cohn. “As a lifelong St. Louisan, building Varsity Tutors in this region has always been of personal importance. We remain committed to being a positive force and economic driver for St. Louis while building a business of global significance.”

St. Charles, Mo.-based **LMI Aerospace** is expanding its Washington, Missouri, operations with a \$17.5-million investment that will result in up to 60 jobs over the next three years. The company provides aerostructures, systems and components to the commercial, business and regional and military aerospace markets; it serves some of the world's largest aerospace firms. The company will expand the Washington facility by one-third to approximately 120,000 sq. ft. (11,150 sq. m.).

Advanced manufacturing is one of the key industries identified in Gov. Jay Nixon's Strategic Initiative for Economic Growth (SIEG), hatched in 2011. From 2010 through 2014, advanced manufacturing employment grew by 19,717 jobs, and aerospace employment grew by 3,121 jobs, according to the latest figures available through 2014.

LMI Aerospace also benefits from Franklin County's highly skilled workforce. The county was the second in Missouri and the nation to achieve maintained status in the Certified Work Ready Community (CWRC) program in 2015.