

# Pittsburgh's BotsIQ Intern Program Marks Successful Summer

By Maria Campieri, *BotsIQ Youth Services Manager*

“When we took a look at our existing workforce as well as the workforce we were recruiting, we noticed a couple of things: our existing staff was aging up and retiring and our method of recruiting needed to adapt to the current labor shortages everywhere,” explained Jessica Gardner, the human resources manager at General Carbide. “By taking on interns, our skilled staff could transfer their knowledge to a younger generation AND the interns could teach us new skills.”

General Carbide was one of 10 manufacturing companies in the Pittsburgh area to employ a summer intern through Pittsburgh Chapter NTMA's BotsIQ.

BotsIQ is the Pittsburgh Chapter's flagship workforce development program. Their goal: to provide a pathway for youth to learn about rewarding career options in manufacturing. While the program hosts many different educational opportunities, they are best known for their signature combat robotics program that begins in the fall and culminates with final battles each spring. However, BotsIQ's workforce development programs do not end when the school year is over.

Summer 2022 marked the second cohort of BotsIQ summer interns. The internship program was designed to continue connecting talented students with industry partners after high school graduation. Internships are available to 18–22-year-olds with an interest in pursuing a career in the manufacturing industry. The internship provides opportunities for participants to grow their professional network, improve career-readiness skills and earn industry credentials through custom onboarding and professional development days.

“Our expectations of our interns were that they trust our process, show up for work and be open to new tasks. We really wanted to push our interns to stretch out of their comfort zones and be a part of our work processes every day.” said Gardner.

BotsIQ connected General Carbide with Caitlyn Razo. “I wanted that hands-on experience, and I knew internships were the best way to learn, apply myself and get that head start in industry,” said Razo.

The pairing turned out to be a great match.

While she completes her senior year at Pennwest California University, Razo stayed on to work part-time at General Carbide as a mechatronics technician.

“This has opened so many more doors for me,” Razo said. “It showed me how involved I can be with automation within manufacturing and how I can intertwine my engineering major with it and work towards my dream goal of animatronics.”

Gardner said that adding interns into their operation brought a new depth to the General Carbide family. “Our workforce embraced them and worked to help them be the best they could be. It was really an incredible thing to watch, and we cannot wait for more!” Gardner said that the company managers are already asking how many interns they will have next summer and when they can start.

The summer 2022 cohort included 12 interns, 6 of whom graduated from high school in June and 6 post-secondary students. Eleven of the interns had previous BotsIQ connections as competitors or volunteers.

BotsIQ coordinates training for interns to earn two industry recognized credentials - OSHA 10 General Industry Safety and Health and a Catalyst Connection Lean Certification. Financial support is provided by the PA Department of Community and Economic Development and Westmoreland Fayette Workforce Investment Board.

Aethon, DMI Companies, General Carbide, Hamill Manufacturing, Heartland Fabrication, Jatco Machine & Tool Co., Inc., L&S Machine Company, MetPlas, Penn State Tool & Die, RETAL all hosted interns in the summer of 2022.

Razo wasn’t the only new hire from the program. There were three permanent job offers extended to summer interns.

“I’m so thankful I took those first steps of putting myself out there and trying my interest and seeing how I can apply myself!” said Razo.

Gardner summed it up, “They brought fresh eyes to projects and asked questions that we may have missed. It was a win-win!”

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