

### Community College Role

## Beaver County Community College Prepares Skilled Workers for \$6 Billion Ethane Cracker Plant

*Key role played by community college there offers a glimpse of possibilities for Erie County*

When Royal Dutch Shell announced that it would build a \$6 billion ethane cracker plant in Beaver County, the southwestern Pennsylvania area was fortunate to already have a key building block in place to help train the future workforce.

The [Community College of Beaver County](#) (CCBC) is already educating 55 students for two-year associate's degrees in process technology, a job that will be in high demand at the cracker plant and other manufacturing businesses. Starting salaries will range between \$40,000 and \$60,000 and could go as high as \$90,000 depending on experience.

The long-standing community college is a vital piece of the economic infrastructure in Beaver County that helped land the new plant, beating out several other states and communities that were wooing Royal Dutch Shell. More than 6,000 construction workers will help build the plant, which will employ more than 600 people on an ongoing basis.

### **'Road to your future'**

As one of 14 community colleges in Pennsylvania, CCBC offers a blueprint for what's possible in Erie County. A community college here could play a major role in attracting new businesses to Erie County, and provide well-trained, highly skilled workers once the business is operating.



Shell's \$6 billion ethane cracker in Beaver County. Photo: Reid Frazier

Hugh Gallagher, who is career coach at CCBC, sees establishing a community college in Erie as a no-brainer. And he's speaking from experience—both in his role as a career coach and from his familiarity with Erie. Gallagher graduated in 2005 from Mercyhurst University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in marriage and family studies. During a recent visit to speak to Mercyhurst students, Gallagher said the topic of a need for a local community college came up.

For Erie, a community college would provide training and skills for a variety of industries, including logistics, machining, plastics and many others. Gallagher said that for many students, the community college is the “road to your future.”

### **Career fairs underway**

Scheduled to open as early as 2020, the huge Royal Dutch Shell petrochemical facility will use extreme heat to convert, or “crack” ethane liquids from Pennsylvania's plentiful Marcellus shale wells into ethylene and polyethylene for the plastics industry.

For CCBC students, the cracker plant offers an obvious place for them to apply for jobs. In fact, the community college has already hosted two career fairs focused on the cracker plant, and a separate one for military veterans, Gallagher said.

CCBC's process technology degree is one part of its effort to train people for advanced manufacturing careers with Shell and other companies. The college also offers building trades technology and an apprenticeship readiness program that align with Shell's workforce needs, Gallagher said.

Full-time and part-time workers will be hired at the plant itself. Requiring certificates and two-year or four-year degrees, those jobs will include positions in process technology, engineering, mechatronics, maintenance and more. Mechatronics is a multi-disciplinary field of science that includes a combination of mechanical engineering, electronics and more.

Further, the college is joining with businesses, nonprofits, and other colleges to form the Tri-State Advanced Manufacturing Consortium to help students and retrain workers to meet the needs of energy and manufacturing companies throughout the region.

The college isn't just waiting for older students to become interested, either. It's also working with K-12 educators and the Beaver County Career and Technology Center to spark an early interest in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) education. After all, the college's process technology program focuses on STEM education.

“By working with K-12 and other higher education institutions, we can build career pathways to address the growing demand in STEM career fields,” Gallagher said.