Mark Mundl of the Racine County Workforce Development Center says the many individual success stories out of the more than 100 boot camp completers from Racine County are what bring him the most satisfaction of his work with the boot camps.

He particularly points to a CNC boot camp completer who worked in finance for years but sought a career change after losing his job. The participant enrolled in and completed the first-ever boot camp five years ago and landed a job in the completely different field of CNC Operator – and has risen through the ranks where he now serves as a supervisor at a local company.

There have been others, too. “A father saw me at an event and thanked me for giving his son the opportunity to gain training in the camp,” he said. “He said his son now has direction, and has a pathway to where he wants to go next. That type of feedback is meaningful to me.”

Mark has had a number of different responsibilities during the creation of the boot camp model and then subsequent ones, helping the boot camps to flourish to become a nationally-recognized successful model of worker training. He began working on the initial team tasked with creating the partnership and the boot camp model and transitioning the boot camp from idea to reality. His initial duties included handling the responsibilities of recruiting participants, managing cases, working with employers on their workforce needs and with Gateway on the boot camp team to hammer out coursework particulars.

He said as the partners worked stronger as a team each successive camp, he shifted into his current role as one of the partners who helps manage the overall camp process. “At the beginning, it was important to work on refining and molding the partnership,” he said.

Mark said the partnership between Gateway and the Workforce Development Center is the ingredient that makes the boot camp a reality. “When I talk with people from outside our area, they are amazed with this partnership. I think sometimes we forget just how well the partnership is working because of how closely we work together.”

Mark said he never strays from what he believes is the cornerstone of the program and the main reason for its success – the customer. To Mark, “customer” has three parts – employer, job seeker and taxpayer. It was meeting the needs of the customer which first brought Mark and Gateway together to create the boot camp, and that mindset continues today.

Gateway and the Workforce Development Center came together at the outset to address specific occupational needs. Employers said they couldn’t fill key positions because the pool of applicants didn’t have the skill set they needed. At the same time, there are unemployed and underemployed workers who could benefit by receiving training in these key skills, and Gateway could provide the training. “We’ve had successive camps and they’ve been successful because we have run them based on what the customer is telling us. We’ve expanded the boot camp offerings because of that to include not only welding, but also CNC and industrial maintenance repair, as well.”

IMR boot camp students worked on a welding project that helped create the HERO Center monument, “On Eagles Wings”. The monument pays tribute to emergency response workers and will hold a piece of the World Trade Center wreckage from 9/11. Learn more about the HERO Center at: www.gtc.edu/HEROCenter
Ron Smith worked as an industrial maintenance technician for nearly a decade but said the credentials and foundational training he’s receiving in the industrial machine repair boot camp will give him more of an edge over other applicants and job security once he’s entered his career.

Ron was laid off from his industrial maintenance job about a year ago because he lacked specific training or credentials required by his employer. He began the road to obtaining that training by enrolling in a Gateway course in Spring 2010, where he learned about the boot camp and applied.

He’s had job offers since starting the boot camp, but has remained steady in his commitment to continuing his training and obtaining the credentials he can use once he returns to the work force. “This is a great opportunity for me to get the training and certificates I need,” said Ron. “I’ve turned down a couple of offers – I want to make sure to get my certifications and training first.”

Ron said he believes the training and credentials of the boot camp will provide him with job security in the future, no matter the economy.

Even though he’s worked in industrial maintenance, the boot camp has still provided him with many new learning opportunities and skills. Ron said working with industrial machines is one thing – learning exactly how they work is another, which will help him progress in his career. “I have worked with them, but knowing how they work and being able to put together an entire system is something I’ve learned at this boot camp,” said Ron.

Ron called the instructors “the best of the best” and said he’s learned from them even more ways to troubleshoot machine and repair issues. “I’ve done a lot of troubleshooting – but the boot camp increased my knowledge. What they are teaching us here makes sense, and a lot of it has to do with the industry knowledge of our instructors,” said Ron.

Rene “Reno” Deltoro, Racine, worked as a welder for many years but looks forward to the different career he will gain through the industrial maintenance repair boot camp. “This is it – this is my stepping stone to my future,” he said.

Rene lost his job in the soft economy when his employer was having financial difficulties.

He said he found it hard to find work not only because of the economy, but also because of a lack of official welding credentials. He said the certifications gained through the boot camp will give him an edge as he seeks jobs once he’s completed the camp. “I had been a welder for 25 years but the problem is if you’re not certified, especially in this economy, a lot of places won’t hire you.”

Rene says he prefers hands-on work and has “done a little bit of everything.” He said the great thing about industrial maintenance is that it touches all of those different skill sets and interests. Rene said the opportunity to be trained in industrial maintenance, to gain those certifications offered by the boot camp and to embark on a new career made for an easy decision.

“It’s a hard thing to start over, especially at my age – but you can’t let life’s opportunities pass you by,” said Rene. “This is an opportunity I couldn’t pass up. This is a chance for me to retool and learn some new skills for a new career.”

Rene says the strengths of the boot camp are the industry-savvy instructors and the hands-on learning. He believes the training he’s receiving provides him with the tools to enter his next career. “When I look at my goals – where I want to go with my career – I realize that the boot camp training will get me there.”