

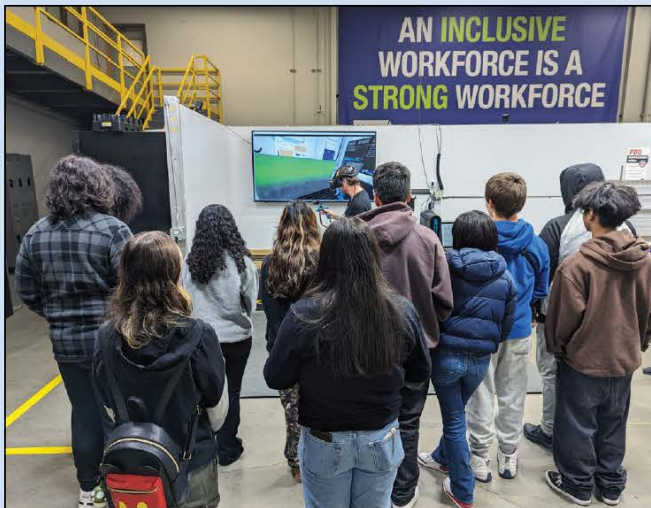
# CHAIR AWARD



**AN INCLUSIVE WORKFORCE IS A STRONG WORKFORCE.**

Skills Inc. (Skills), a nonprofit social enterprise with a social mission of expanding employment opportunities for people with disabilities, was established in 1966 with a \$5,000 grant from the Boeing Employee Good Neighbor Fund. Originally located in the Seattle neighborhood of Ballard, the organization now operates out of three facilities in Auburn, Washington, with approximately 200,000 square feet of space, and has a team of 300 employees. As a contract manufacturer, they provide a broad set of manufacturing capabilities and special processing (finish) services to the aerospace industry.

As one of the largest aerospace suppliers in Washington State, Skills is part of the supply chain for OEMs such as Boeing, Northrop Grumman, and Blue Origin. Leading the organization is CEO Todd Dunnington. He believes that the future of aerospace manufacturing will include a more diverse workforce. And the quickest way to that vision is through lean manufacturing practices that promote standardization and the streamlined transfer of knowledge to new employees.



The goal at Skills is to provide safe, capable and efficient processes to meet their customer's requirements. They have proven that setting employees up for success and making sure no one is left behind is just good business. Removing tribal knowledge and embracing standardized processes along with a culture of continuous improvement is one of several important ways to solve the looming crisis of too few workers joining the industry. Walking through their facilities, you see tremendous investment in state-of-the-art equipment and technology.

Such investments and process improvements, however, are completed with an eye towards making sure they are accessible, standardized and employee friendly.

Skills serves as a model for inclusion and best practices in recruiting, onboarding, and employing individuals with disabilities. It might surprise some readers that most disabilities are non-apparent. Mr. Dunnington points out that "... disabilities may be physical, medical, sensory, learning, or emotional. Our goal is to change the narrative and we do this by normalizing disabilities and removing the stigma that people with disabilities may feel."



Todd Dunnington, Skills Inc.

At Skills, employees are valued for their abilities, and the focus is on job fit; where employees are hired for what they CAN do. The organization has implemented a structured onboarding process to identify potential accommodations, fostering an environment where individuals with and without disabilities successfully work side by side across all departments. "We focus on hiring outstanding people," says Dunnington. Workplace expectations center around respect for coworkers and working to one's full potential, creating a culture of shared success. The result is a level of teamwork and collaboration that helps Skills stand out as a preferred place to work. This helps with both recruiting and retention. Noteworthy, sixty percent of the employees at Skills have a disability and workplace expectations are the same for everyone.

In addition to being a highly respected aerospace supplier, Skills also provides vocational programs for adults and youth. For over two decades Skills has managed an Aerospace Internship Program serving high school juniors and seniors with disabilities. This initiative has equipped over 1,000 students with essential work readiness skills, preparing them for successful employment journeys once they leave high school.

Truly, Skills winning the 2024 PNAA Chair Award is a testament to its unwavering dedication to a culture of inclusion. Skills, along with PNAA, supports the notion that "aerospace manufacturing is for everyone." As they continue to inspire change and lead by example, Skills stands as a role model for a more inclusive and innovative future in the Pacific Northwest aerospace industry.

*This award is chosen by PNAA's board chair to recognize the contribution of an individual, company or organization in raising the standard of the Aerospace Industry in the Pacific Northwest.*