

# Camden Rotary Club explores pathways to better jobs for Mainers

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The Camden Rotary Club focused this past week on ways to open up better job opportunities for Mainers, particularly those in the Midcoast.

Guest speaker Dr. Jason Judd, executive director of Educate Maine, explained the work of MaineSpark, a statewide coalition focused on increasing the number of adults with degrees or credentials to meet the needs of Maine's employers.

"About 50 percent of Maine adults currently have degrees or credentials of value, but we need far more trained workers to fill good quality jobs in our state," said Judd. "MaineSpark aims to raise the number of adults to 60 percent by 2025." This increase would help the state meet the projected need for 158,000 five years from now. An essential means of achieving that is to increase collaboration between educators and employers.

To achieve the state's attainment goal, educators, government officials, businesses, community volunteers, and organizations such as Educate Maine that affiliate with MaineSpark are working to develop education and career pathways for young people and adults to pursue occupations in high-demand industries.

"We have a serious skills gap in Maine," said Judd. "But by supporting upskilling programs offered by educational institutions and employers, Maine can develop a workforce that is ready to succeed in skilled, good-paying jobs."

Judd emphasized that MaineSpark wants to help connect people of all ages to appropriate education opportunities: "If someone wants to learn more about potential training opportunities, they can contact a local navigator through the MaineSpark website."

The coalition seeks to break down any barriers that preclude people from getting the training they need. "We care about everything from access to broadband and increased financial aid to support from the schools and the provision of reliable and affordable childcare."

Asked about the most promising job opportunities in the Midcoast, Judd cited significant work opportunities in the marine industries, trades such as construction and machine technology, and potentially aquaculture. Jobs in hospitals and medical practices are especially plentiful, at all levels of experience.

"For both young people and adults, the number of job openings at healthcare facilities is very high," said Judd. "We are seeing a huge need for CNAs (certified nursing assistants). This is not a high-wage occupation, so we encourage CNAs to continue training for other roles, such as nurses or patient service reps."

Jonathan Goss, the lead organizer of the presentation series, said it is helping club members learn about local needs and identify possible ways to help.

“Jason’s talk helped us understand how the efforts of Educate Maine and MaineSpark can be applied to our region’s specific economic workforce situation and needs,” said Goss. “We will begin working within Rotary to come up with action plans for this aspect of our ongoing Midcoast economic development study.”

Judd’s presentation was the third in a monthly series the club is hosting to foster learning about and finding creative solutions for economic challenges in the Midcoast. It followed talks by Martha Bentley, director of economic development coordination for the State of Maine, on the State’s 10-year economic development strategy, and Bill Najpauer, executive director of the Mid Coast Economic Development District (MCEDD), on regional economic trends.

Anyone who would like to attend can obtain connection details from Stephanie Griffin: [steph.griffinsg00@gmail.com](mailto:steph.griffinsg00@gmail.com).