

## **U.S. Forest Service Awards \$75,000 Grant to WCA to Help Maintain the Economic Competitiveness of the Hardwood Industry**

Nellysford, VA – The Woodwork Career Alliance announces the receipt of a \$75,000 U.S. Forest Service Wood Education and Resource Center (WERC) grant encouraging innovation and the sharing of processing and marketing knowledge with wood products manufacturers in the Eastern United States. The primary goal of the grants is to keep local wood businesses globally competitive and sustainable. "An important component of improving the health and stewardship of hardwood forests is to maintain a vibrant forest products industry that has the ability to sustainably utilize lower-value trees for products that will assist our citizens with their energy needs as well as provide locally produced wood products used in our daily lives," said Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry Director Kathryn Maloney.

The Woodwork Career Alliance (WCA) will use this grant to engage in a multi-state initiative to create a national passport program to provide a portable credential for individuals in the woodwork industry to quantify and qualify their ability to operate woodwork tools properly and safely to create high quality wood products. When fully operational, there will be hundreds of skill certifications/passport stamps with up to 3 levels of achievement for each operation. Certifications will not be tied to specific occupations or jobs. Rather, WCA will provide a menu of certifications from which employers can select the tools and tool operation level relevant to their jobs or training needs.

The number one challenge of business today is finding and keeping qualified employees. In most parts of the country woodworking companies are facing a skills crisis. Hiring woodworkers that have the right skills; targeting training dollars to keep costs down; increasing production and reducing waste, retaining the top performers; having a level playing field for compensation; and attracting new talent to the industry—these are the concerns being voiced by plant owners and managers.

These concerns have not fallen on deaf ears. To ensure a workforce prepared for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, WCA developed and released the *Woodwork Manufacturing Skill Standards*—observable and measurable standards for 33 tool and machine operations, through a cooperative effort between the U.S. Forest Service and a number of associations and organization. The Woodwork Passport is the logical continuation of this bold initiative.

Funding is provided through the U.S. Forest Service Wood Education and Resource Center, located in Princeton, WV. The Center's mission is to work with the forest products industry toward sustainable forest products production for the eastern hardwood forest region. For more information, visit <http://www.na.fs.fed.us/werc/>.

The Woodwork Career Alliance, The Woodwork Career Alliance of North America (WCA) is a non-profit organization actively promoting a skilled workforce for the advanced woodworking industry with Woodwork Manufacturing Skill Standards - observable and measurable standards for tool and machine operations to evaluate performance and results produced by woodworking professionals and Credentials – a portable, permanent record of a woodworker's level of competency in tool and machine operations. For more information, visit <http://www.woodworkcareer.org>.