

MANUFACTURING DAY



Photos by Don Campbell / HP staff

Hundreds of area students talk to exhibitors Friday during Manufacturing Day held at Sunset Tool Inc. and Eagle Technology in Bridgman. Area business owners were on hand to show the students what manufacturing is like today. Many say they have trouble filling jobs because of a lack of skilled, trained workers.

Seeing factories in the future?

Manufacturing has its day among young people, legislators

By JULIE SWIDWA
HP Staff Writer

BRIDGMAN — Kyle McGee, a senior at Coloma High School, has always planned to major in drama. But now he has a second major in mind.

"I've always been interested in learning about this type of thing, and I wanted to see what's here. I think I might take on a second major in glass-making or metal works," McGee, 18, said Friday. "I'm planning to go to (Lake Michigan College), and they have a good drama program and a good drafting and glass and metal works program."

McGee was among about 200 area high school



John Lanphear, owner of Lanphear Tool Works and Engineering in Lawrence, shows Benton Harbor High School sophomore Tonia Huddlestone one of his company's ergonomic workstations. About 200 area students attended the event designed to pique their interest in careers in manufacturing.

students who converged on some 20 exhibitors for an open house at Sunset Tool Inc. in Bridgman marking Manufacturing Day. Sunset Tool was also celebrating its 20th anniversary. A neighboring business, Eagle Technolo-

gy, took part in the day by giving tours of its facility led by the company's president, Dan Hanson.

"These kids are the lifeblood of the future of manufacturing. We need kids to jump into the trades and hopefully some-

day take my job," Hanson said. The event was hosted by Kinexus (formerly Michigan Works). Spokeswoman Megan McCausland said Kinexus joined in events happening all across the nation Friday because "we want to correct the misperception that manufacturing is a dying, dirty industry. There's high-tech, high-paying jobs out there."

Marty Mason, owner of

Sunset Tool, said he has

been in manufacturing for

38 years, starting as an ap-

prentice and rising through

the ranks to be the owner

of a company.

"It's important for these

young people to under-

stand the opportunities

and to see how shops are

operated today. There's

too many misconceptions

that manufacturing is

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dirty, low paying, has no longevity and no opportunity for growth,” Mason said.

While kids visited the exhibitor booths, lawmakers gave company officials a legislative update related to manufacturing.

State Rep. Al Pscholka, R-Stevensville, said the state made a huge mistake about 10 years ago, believing manufacturing was dead and urging every student to get a four-year college degree.

“That was absolutely the wrong message,” Pscholka said.

He and state Sen. John Proos, R-St. Joseph, said all young people should get training and education beyond high school, but two-year degrees, one-year certificates and apprenticeships are fine steps toward a rewarding career in manufacturing.

He said Michigan created 88,000 manufacturing jobs from December 2009 to March 2013 and currently boasts 550,000 jobs in the industry.

Pscholka said that with an aging workforce, it's essential to get young people excited about manufacturing.

“In Michigan we build stuff. It's what we do, and we're good at it,” he said. “We've got to have the workforce to fill these jobs. Hats off to Kinexus and the businesses that are here today.”

He and Proos said the Legislature is doing its part through tax reform that is leveling the playing field

for companies located in or moving to Michigan and by creating flexibility in high school graduation requirements to make career technical education a more viable path for students.

At the federal level, Clay McCausland from U.S. Rep. Fred Upton's office said Upton, R-St. Joseph, supports efforts to improve job training for Michigan's unemployed, particularly in industries like manufacturing that are begging for workers.

He said Upton voted in favor of pending legislation called the SKILLS Act, which would streamline the current maze of federal job-training programs, providing a more effective network of training services. SKILLS stands for Supporting Knowledge and Investing in Lifelong Skills.

The SKILLS Act, H.R. 803, eliminates 35 ineffective federal programs and creates a flexible Workforce Investment Fund, McCausland said.

In voting in favor of the legislation, Upton said it would promote an employer-driven training system, allowing workforce development organizations to better tailor training to employment needs in their areas.

The pending legislation also eliminates 19 federal mandates regarding the makeup of local Workforce Investment Boards and ensures that two-thirds of state and local board members are employers, the end users of any job-training system.

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