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Kevin Kreitner, right, with the Lake Michigan College manufacturing department, demonstrates a mini CNC machine Friday for Berrien Springs High School students, from left, Joshua Bennett, Brady West, and Allen Yvinskas. The teens are participating in the second annual Manufacturing Day at Mach Mold Inc. in Benton Township.

# Fashioning the future

Industry leaders, educators, students come together for Manufacturing Day

By JOHN MATUSZAK  
HP Staff Writer

**BENTON TOWNSHIP** — The manufacturing industry is looking brighter, inside and out, participants in the second annual Manufacturing Day said.

“Most people are exposed to manufacturing by what they see on a TV show, a plant that is a dark, dirty hole with flames coming out. That’s in the past,” said Bill Mach, owner of Mach Mold, and host of Friday’s event to introduce high school students to training and job opportunities in the field.

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# MANUFACTURING

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Today's shops, including his own, run on brain power, augmented by high-tech computers and lasers, Mach said.

"The obvious change has been in technology," he said. "Forty years ago there was a tremendous amount of physical work. Compared to today, the physical portion has been dramatically reduced."

Employment prospects are looking up, too, he said.

"The recent economy has taken some of the shine off, but the shine is coming back."

How much has the manufacturing industry come back?

According to figures provided by Kinexus, one of the organizers of the event, there are 455 manufacturing businesses in Berrien, Cass and Van Buren counties, and almost 17,000 manufacturing jobs – representing one out of five jobs.

Those jobs have annual earnings of almost \$83,000, higher than the national average.

Gabe Kooyers, an instructor in the advanced manufacturing program at the Van Buren Technology



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**David Essig, right, with Accu-Die & Mold, Inc., out of Stevensville, chats with Joe Miller, a student at Lakeshore High School, Friday, October 3, 2014, during the second annual Manufacturing Day held at Mach Mold, Inc., in Benton Harbor.**

Center, agreed that "right now industry is booming."

Employers are calling the center and other training sites looking for potential employees, Kooyers said. The center this year placed four students in apprenticeship programs in engineering, plastics injection molding, and machining.

The challenge is convincing students that there are high-paying, high-demand jobs in manufacturing out

there, Kooyers said. "We need students to grasp that these are high-skill, high-wage, high-demand jobs."

One of those students is Caleb Collins of Gobles. Instead of sitting in a classroom learning trigonometry from a textbook, he has been using those skills to shape molds to make fishing lures for an area company. Classes used the brain from a robot to make a remote-control lawn mower.

Nathaniel Nannfeldt, a sophomore at Berrien Springs High School, said he is getting the message that if you work hard in school and are qualified, you will be hired.

He has enrolled in the school's new Project Lead the Way for students interested in engineering.

Manufacturing Day highlighted the partnerships between high schools, college programs and industry to

build the local work force. One of the strengths of this region is the cooperation between educators and industry, Bill Mach said.

Lake Michigan College works with students at Lakeshore, Brandywine and Coloma in the FIRST Robotics competition, fostering technical and technological skills, said Ken Flowers, an LMC career and work force educator.

LMC also has a strong apprenticeship program, and high school students can earn college credits before they graduate, he said.

Dan Mitchell, president of Hanson Mold, is proof that you can start on the ground floor and work your way to the top.

As a high school student in Bridgman, Mitchell took part in an industry tour similar to Manufacturing Day, and joined an apprentice welding program as a sophomore.

After graduating, he moved up to supervisor and then entered sales, eventually joining the front office.

The same opportunities are there today for young people, he said. "The prospects are just as good, or better, than they were 32 years ago."

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