

BRIGHT FUTURE FOR MANUFACTURING, TRADES JOBS: Group addresses future for area high school students

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EDWARDSVILLE - With 1,500 job openings expected in the manufacturing sector in Southwestern Illinois in the next five years, and an additional 1,200 jobs opening up in

the trades, regional leaders today gathered to announce the launch of a marketing and outreach initiative to link today's high school students to the career opportunities that lie ahead.

The event at Cope Plastics was led by the Madison-Bond and MidAmerica workforce investment boards, in collaboration with a variety of partners, the two-pronged campaign theme is ***Manufacture Your Future/Craft Your Future – A Career that Pays in Southwestern Illinois.***

The campaign aims to educate high school students, parents, guidance counselors, principals and other influencers about the high-paying jobs that will be available in both sectors, the skills needed for the positions opening up, and the path to follow in order to land one. Manufacturing jobs in Madison and St. Clair counties offer average earnings topping **\$80,000 a year**, well above the national average. Careers in the trades also come with a high wage, averaging almost \$33 per hour plus benefits of \$22, for a **total of \$55 an hour.**

The campaign was conceived by the two workforce investment boards and the Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois' Manufacturing Steering Committee, whose members include the heads of the two workforce investment boards and representatives of local manufacturers and employers such as Phillips66, SunCoke Energy, U.S. Steel, Olin Corporation, Dynegy, Progressive Recovery, Inc., Metro East Industries, Affton Chemical, the ROHO Group, America's Central Port and Wertz Welding. Key leaders at the Southwestern Illinois Building and Construction Trades Council, Southwestern Illinois College and Lewis and Clark Community College also serve on the committee, along with the Superintendents of Schools for both Madison and St. Clair counties. Working together over the past year or so, they discovered that workforce availability and lack of skills were the greatest impediment to future growth of the manufacturing industry and set about addressing that issue.



“The top 50 manufacturers in Southwestern Illinois account for approximately 16,000 jobs, while smaller manufacturers employ many more,” noted SunCoke Energy’s General Manager Don Vichitvongsa, Chair of the Manufacturing Steering Committee. “Thousands retiring in the coming years will create a wave of openings that will be hard to fill unless more people open their minds to the prospect of a future career in manufacturing or the many trades that support our manufacturers.”

David Stoecklin, executive director of the Madison-Bond Workforce Development Board adds, “This campaign aims to dispel the myth of manufacturing as dirty work, mediocre pay and job insecurity and instead spotlight the reality, which is opportunities for a fast-paced, high-paying career using the latest in state-of-the-art technology.”

An added benefit of a career path in manufacturing is that many of the available jobs can be obtained with just a high school diploma or equivalent, along with on-the-job training, while others require various certifications that can be earned in two years or less and at far less cost than earning a four-year degree. The path to a successful future in the trades typically involves an apprenticeship that makes you part of the workforce from day one, so people get paid during their on-the-job training.

Recognizing that many families, educators and counselors have been conditioned to think that the college track is the only path to a family supporting career and enviable lifestyle, the campaign will include efforts to reach not only students, but also their parents and the influencers within the school system. The goal is for all to gain a better understanding of the tremendous opportunities that exist, determine if an individual student's existing skills and interests may better align with one of the hands-on jobs that local companies and trades will need to fill and identify the steps needed to prepare them for those positions.

“The Leadership Council engaged several educators and leaders in the education arena to serve in a volunteer capacity on the committee and provide input on the messaging and avenues to deliver those messages to reach the various targeted audiences,” noted Rick Stubblefield, Workforce Development Governance & Program Coordinator for St. Clair County. “Now, after months of planning, we’re ready to begin spreading the word.”

As the campaign shifts to implementation phase, billboards are already in place in three prominent locations in Southwestern Illinois highlighting the new www.wellpaid.info website that's been launched to provide more information, along with the toll-free **844-well-paid** phone number that people can call to connect directly with contacts at the workforce investment boards to learn more. A speakers' bureau armed with informative brochures is preparing to hit the road to spread the word directly to students, counselors and principals at high schools throughout Southwestern Illinois, and the parents of students attending those schools will hear the message at PTA meetings and through school newsletters. Facilities tours will be coordinated for students and school staff and faculty to see first-hand what today's advanced manufacturing entails. The campaign's launch aims to spread the word through traditional media channels, while future plans call for social media to be utilized to even better connect with students and provide opportunities for them to share this message through their social networks. All these efforts will drive traffic to the website and toll-free number so people can learn what they may specifically need in terms of training for a particular career and request details on manufacturers with job openings and how to apply. More details on the individual opportunities within each of the trades, from carpentry or iron worker to electrician or operating engineer and many others, will also be available.

Students will also be able to learn more about career opportunities in manufacturing and the trades by participating in two upcoming events. On Oct. 2nd, from 8 am to 1 pm, they can celebrate Manufacturing Day. With the theme from "Handmade to High-Tech.", the day starts at Southwestern Illinois College Sam Wolf Granite City Campus Industrial Technology Center Open House. Students can tour the newly renovated SWIC manufacturing facility, see demonstrations of cutting-edge technology, try virtual welding and meet local manufacturers displaying their products and capabilities. (<http://www.swic.edu/mfgday/>). Then on Nov. 2nd through Nov. 5th, they can check out

the Metro Career Expo, taking place at the Belle-Clair Fairground and Expo Center in Belleville. It is anticipated that over 750 students will attend to get “hands-on” experience with some of the construction trades. More details will be available in the coming weeks.

“The manufacturing sector has long been a mainstay of the Southwestern Illinois economy and we just learned through a study commissioned by the Leadership Council that our region is one of the best locations for manufacturing in the Midwest and has the largest number of workers employed in manufacturing of its peer cities,” noted Alan Dunstan, Madison County Board Chairman. “That all bodes well for the future of manufacturing in our region and underscores the importance of this campaign that’s getting underway.”

St. Clair County Board Chairman Mark Kern added, “While many of the positions are opening up due to retirements versus growth, they still represent opportunity for stable employment in our region, as well as tremendous opportunity for today’s youth who may not be college bound or would prefer to avoid the cost of earning a four-year degree. This campaign will help them to take a different path and get on the fast track to the future they’ve always dreamed about.”

The Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois is a member-based, economic development corporation representing Madison and St. Clair counties. The Council works to unite business, industry, government, education and labor for economic growth in Southwestern Illinois. These effective partnerships serve as a driving force behind successful economic development efforts throughout the Metro East region.

