

Youth encouraged to consider careers in manufacturing or the trades

by David Stoecklin and Rick Stubblefield
October 26 2015 4:51 PM



The manufacturing sector has long been a mainstay of our nation's and our region's economy. More than 16,000 individuals earn their living working at one of the top 50 manufacturing operations in Southwestern Illinois, and smaller manufacturers account for many more jobs. A study recently commissioned by the Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois found that our region is one of the best Midwest locations for manufacturing and has the largest number of workers employed in manufacturing compared to peer cities. While those findings underscore the continued importance of

this vibrant sector of our region's economy, there are obstacles to overcome to sustain and grow it.

Manufacturers here and across the country are facing big issues in the coming years related to workforce availability and lack of skills. With thousands of workers set to retire by the end of this decade, a wave of openings will go unfilled unless more people open their minds to the possibility of a career in manufacturing or the many trades supporting it.

Rather than sit idly by and watch that scenario unfold, leaders in Southwestern Illinois are working to link high school students to the career opportunities ahead. The Madison-Bond and MidAmerica workforce investment boards are leading a new outreach initiative that also has financial support from the Southern Illinois Construction Advancement Program. They are working in collaboration with the Leadership Council, the two regional superintendents of Schools, Lewis & Clark Community College, Southwestern Illinois College, the Southwestern Illinois Building and Construction Trades Council and many local manufacturers and employers. The two-pronged campaign theme is **Manufacture Your Future/Craft Your Future – A Career that Pays in Southwestern Illinois**.

The high-paying opportunities will be plentiful. In total, almost 3,000 jobs will be opening up in manufacturing and the trades in Southwestern Illinois in the next five years. 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.



The initiative underway highlights those numbers, but it also aims to dispel the myth that manufacturing involves dirty work and job insecurity. In reality, today's manufacturing industry offers fast-paced, high-paying careers using the latest in state-of-the-art technology. And when local craftsmen pick up their high-tech tools, many are doing critical work at one of the dozens of manufacturing facilities in Southwestern Illinois.

A new website - www.wellpaid.info, toll-free phone number – (844) *well-paid*, informational brochures, speakers bureau, facilities tours and events such as the

upcoming Metro Construction Career Expo will spread the word directly to students, parents, counselors and principals at high schools throughout Southwestern Illinois. The goal is to showcase what today's advanced manufacturing entails and provide insight into an alternative career path for those who may not be interested in college or don't want to take on the cost of earning a four-year degree.

All these efforts will highlight what's needed in terms of training for a particular career and provide access to details on job openings and how to apply.



Opportunities abound for those with certain skills and education, so students will be encouraged to focus on developing high safety and environmental awareness; proficiency in math, reading comprehension, computer skills and mechanical reasoning; troubleshooting skills and the ability to work in a team environment. They will be urged to secure a high school diploma or equivalent; complete an associated vocational program and gain computer literacy and familiarity with Microsoft applications.

With these skills, they will learn that great jobs can be found in some of the best recognized companies in the country that are based in Southwestern Illinois, including

Phillips66, Dynegy, SunCoke Energy and Olin Corporation, along with growing local businesses such as The ROHO Group, Progressive Recovery Inc., Metro East Industries and others.

If you know a high school student who's interested in gaming, computers, building things or other hands-on activities, encourage them to call or log on to learn more. You could help to put them on the path to financial security for the future.