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## **Improving Talent Pipeline in Local Schools Would Help Boost Economy in Region, Manufacturing Interests Say**

By Tom Pink

The Michigan Manufacturers Association asked for help from Eastern Upper Peninsula businesses to recruit more students into manufacturing jobs during the fourth annual Manufacturing Day luncheon Tuesday, December 13, at Lake Superior State University in Sault Ste. Marie.

The luncheon, sponsored by the Michigan Manufacturers Association (MMA) and Sault Ste. Marie Economic Development Corporation, attracted between 50 and 60 people, many representing business interests not only in Chippewa and Mackinac counties, but Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario.

A new program will provide manufacturing education in some Michigan communities, said Chuck Hadden, MMA president and CEO, through a partnership between the MMA and the Society of Manufacturing Engineers' Education Foundation Partnership Response in Manufacturing Education (PRIME) initiative and the Manufacturing Institute's "Dream it. Do it" Program.

"With baby boomers retiring, this helps create a pipeline into manufacturing," Mr. Hadden said. "Not every kid needs to go to college. Some do, but some may want to do something else...We're continuing to work with the legislature to customize a curriculum to grow talent pipelines. It's designed by manufacturers with the tools to communicate to parents, teachers, and students."

The formalized push to bring manufacturing into the minds of students began this summer, but it has been talked about for much longer, he said.

“Michigan is leading the nation in manufacturing growth,” Mr. Hadden said. “It’s 21.4% of our gross state product, employing more than 602,000 people. We’ve added nearly 150,000 jobs in manufacturing since 2010.”

Mr. Hadden said most Michigan manufacturing firms have fewer than 100 employees, and 65% are family-owned.

“We think manufacturing is in our DNA,” he said of Michigan, adding that an increase in manufacturing jobs in the state will allow youth to stay in the communities where they grew up.

In addition to advocating for manufacturers, Mr. Hadden said the MMA works with legislators on energy, tax, environmental, and health care policies, as well as education.

Among those attending the program was Dick Sterk, member of the Mackinac Economic Alliance board of directors. In addition to Mr. Hadden, speakers included Amy Berglund, business development manager in the U.P. for the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), and Chris Bosio, MEDC International Trade manager from the MEDC Traverse City office.

Gwen Worley, a member of the Sault Ste. Marie EDC board and the Eastern U.P. Intermediate School District board, expressed an interest in connecting area schools with manufacturing companies in the region. She said a recently defeated millage that centered on career and technical education could have helped in that regard.

“The schools are very interested in proceeding with another attempt at a regional millage to focus on career and technical education opportunities for our students,” Ms. Worley said. “It’s always hard to get a millage passed, but this one is really important to the future of the workforce and our area...We need to get the word out to the public that the skilled trades provide good careers and meaningful work in our area, and those credentials will take you anywhere.”

Sault Ste. Marie City Commission Kathy Twardy agreed, saying manufacturing jobs are usually higher-paying jobs with a direct impact on cities.

“For every one manufacturing job, it creates another four to five other jobs out there,” she said.

Don Plumm, owner of P and P Power in Kincheloe, expressed the need for Michigan manufacturers to recognize that journeymen should be paid a higher wage in order to keep them in the state, where they provide valuable training for younger workers.

“When will manufacturers understand that they need to pay people with experience what they’re worth?” he asked. “When you go to school, you come out with the basics, but there’s no training like what you’ll get from journeymen machinists... Our talent is leaving the state.”

Mr. Hadden expressed his hope that an increased effort to improve the talent pipeline in the schools would help keep more workers from leaving the state to find better paying jobs.

Sault EDC Director Jeff Holt said manufacturing jobs in Sault Ste. Marie continue to expand, with more than 500 so far. He pointed out one of the newest firms in the area, SIS Inc., a steel processing and fabrication firm that started in Sault, Ontario, is now operating in Sault, Michigan.

Sault Ste. Marie Mayor Tony Bosbous welcomed those who attended by expressing the city’s support for their businesses.

“We appreciate what manufacturing means for our area, as do our citizens...We’ll do whatever is in our power to make life here successful for you and your employees,” he said.

In their presentations, Amy Gerlund, a former regional representative for Senator Carl Levin, encouraged U.P. employers to contact her regarding MMA resources, and Ishpeming native Chris Bosio, of Traverse City, discussed small grants available to manufacturers in his coverage area, which reaches from Saginaw to Ironwood.

David Finley, LSSU provost, told those in attendance the university can help with finding internship candidates.

For more information on the MMA, visit [mimfg.org](http://mimfg.org). A list of MEA representatives is at [mackinaceconomicalliance.org](http://mackinaceconomicalliance.org), and the Sault Ste. Marie EDC has a Web site at [saultedc.com](http://saultedc.com).

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