



January 27, 2026

## *Workforce*

### **‘Manufacturing Readiness’ to Debut in February**

LMMC is launching Manufacturing Readiness next month, a new pre-apprenticeship program designed to prepare individuals for immediate employment with local manufacturers and strengthen the region’s workforce pipeline.

Manufacturing Readiness is a free, four-week, boot-camp-style program that combines hands-on manufacturing training with career readiness instruction. No prior experience is required.

Participants attend Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the BC3@Lawrence campus in Shenango Commons and can earn performance-based stipends of up to \$750.

LMMC manufacturing members designed the well-rounded, rigorous and foundational instructional approach which includes vetting of applicants, drug testing and background screening.

Technical instruction is led by Butler County Community

College and focuses on foundational manufacturing skills such as OSHA 10 safety, measurement tools, manufacturing math, quality control and lockout and tagout.

Career readiness training is provided by Goodwill Industries and PA CareerLink® and emphasizes employability skills including professionalism, communication, interviewing, digital literacy and financial literacy.

Manufacturing Readiness also connects participants directly with local employers through plant tours, employer visits and mock interviews. Graduates also receive priority consideration for open positions with LMMC member manufacturers.

The program's goal is to prepare individuals for immediate entry into successful and long-term manufacturing careers in Lawrence and Mercer counties while helping employers meet workforce needs.

Click here to view the application link or contact Julie Michael Smith at julie@lawrencemercermfg.com for more information.

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### Looking Ahead: What 2026 Holds for LMMC

As LMMC enters 2026, the organization is moving from early momentum to program delivery, deeper member engagement and measurable workforce impact across the region.

The year ahead will focus on practical collaboration among manufacturers, education and workforce partners, with an emphasis on solutions that directly address shared hiring and retention challenges.

“2026 feels like a year where a lot of things start to come together,” said Anna Barendsfeld, board president for LMMC and VP of strategic initiatives at ELLWOOD. “We’ve spent time building relationships and listening to manufacturers, and now we’re in a place where we can really start putting that work into action.”

A key milestone in the year ahead will be the launch of Manufacturing Readiness, LMMC’s first signature training and recruiting initiative, beginning in February.

The program is designed to prepare jobseekers for immediate entry into manufacturing careers while helping member companies strengthen their talent pipelines.

In the new year, LMMC will also sharpen its focus on manufacturing career awareness, recognizing that workforce development starts well before a job application is submitted.

Guided by manufacturer input, the Coalition is working to better define and communicate clear career pathways, increase hands-on engagement with students and ensure outreach efforts reflect how young people actually learn about careers today.

Member engagement will remain a priority throughout the year.

As an example, LMMC plans to host manufacturer forums focused on workforce development topics, funding opportunities and peer best practices.

In 2026, LMMC's focus remains clear: strengthening the manufacturing workforce pipeline while supporting the long-term competitiveness of local manufacturers.

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### Save-the-Date: Semi-Annual Meeting April 22

Members, partners and community stakeholders will convene for LMMC's Semi-Annual Membership & Community Meeting on Tuesday, April 22 from 8 - 10 a.m.

Location and agenda details are forthcoming.

This no-cost morning meeting will provide updates on Coalition progress and ongoing workforce initiatives while offering an opportunity for members to connect and share input on priorities shaping the region's manufacturing talent pipeline.

Members and community partners are encouraged to attend and participate in shaping the coalition's work for the months ahead.

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## News



### Forward Lawrence Names Abramovic as New CEO

LMMC member Forward Lawrence has announced the appointment of Albert “Chip” Abramovic as its next president and CEO, marking a leadership transition at one of the region’s key economic development organizations.

Abramovic brings experience in economic development, site selection and regional growth strategy.

In an interview with The Business Journal, he emphasized a focus on building from Lawrence County's existing strengths, including its manufacturing base, workforce and available sites, while strengthening collaboration across public and private sectors.

Forward Lawrence plays a central role in supporting business attraction, expansion and investment throughout the county, making its leadership direction especially relevant to manufacturers and workforce partners.

The organization's work closely aligns with LMMC's mission to support manufacturing growth and workforce readiness across Lawrence and Mercer counties.

"Forward Lawrence is a key partner in connecting economic development strategy with the real-world needs of local manufacturers," said Julie Michael Smith, coalition manager, LMMC. "Strong leadership is important to strengthen alignment around workforce development, infrastructure and long-term economic competitiveness."

Abramovic succeeds Ben Bush, who led Forward Lawrence through a period of organizational growth and positioning.

Abramovic plans to spend his early months listening to stakeholders, building relationships and identifying opportunities to better leverage local assets.

As an LMMC member organization, Forward Lawrence remains an important collaborator in advancing shared goals

that support manufacturers, strengthen the workforce pipeline and promote sustainable economic growth in the region.

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## News

### New Member Profile: German American Chamber of Commerce Pittsburgh Chapter

Building a skilled manufacturing workforce requires proven training models and strong employer engagement, and the German American Chamber of Commerce Pittsburgh Chapter (GACC PIT Chapter) brings both to LMMC.

Since 2015, the GACC PIT Chapter has worked with manufacturers, schools and communities to deliver registered apprenticeship programs that combine paid, on-the-job training with classroom instruction.

The GACC PIT Chapter currently offers six high-demand apprenticeship programs: Mechatronics

Technician, Polymer Process Technician, Sales Engineer, CAM/CAD Technical Designer, EV Automotive Technician and Chemistry Lab Technician.



German American  
Chambers of Commerce  
Deutsch-Amerikanische  
Handelskammern



Apprentices split time between work and education, with pre-apprenticeship opportunities available for high school seniors to strengthen the talent pipeline before graduation.

For employers, these programs provide a practical solution to persistent workforce challenges. All apprenticeships are registered with the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry, are nationally recognized and lead to official Journeyworker credentials.

Through partnerships with five Western Pennsylvania community colleges, apprentices can earn college credit toward an associate degree or certificate, along with industry-recognized German DIHK certification.

Wayne Clark, a Sales Engineer Apprentice at Leybold USA, says the program delivers value on both a personal and professional level.

“The camaraderie and the experience you gain is priceless,” Clark said. “It’s given me the ability to find a company I’m happy with and continue investing in my career and my employer.”

As a new LMMC member, the GACC PIT Chapter expands the Coalition’s ability to connect manufacturers with apprenticeship solutions that support long-term workforce growth across Lawrence and Mercer counties.

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*Photo Courtesy of Lawrence County School-To-Work, Inc.*

### **‘Girls Engaging Mentors’ Highlights Local Manufacturing Careers**

Freshman girls from across the region gathered at the Lawrence County Career and Technical Center (LCCTC) for the annual Girls Engaging Mentors event, an introduction to nontraditional career paths that exist close to home and lead directly to family-sustaining jobs.

Throughout the day, students heard a consistent message: rewarding careers are available in Lawrence and Mercer counties without leaving the region.

Manufacturing, engineering and other skilled technical fields continue to offer strong wages, advancement opportunities and long-term stability for those willing to explore them.

The event brought together freshman girls from all eight Lawrence County school districts, as well as Riverside in Beaver County.

They were also joined by upper class women from LCCTC, giving younger students the opportunity to see peers who are already further along in hands-on, career-focused programs.

Among the presenters was Dylann Yarrington, who shared how attending a similar career awareness event as a student helped shape her own career path.

“Career awareness events opened my eyes to opportunities I hadn’t considered and showed me there isn’t just one path to success,” Yarrington said. “When girls can see real people in their communities working in these careers, those paths feel achievable and worth exploring.”

That early exposure led her to a professional role with LMMC member ELLWOOD.

Girls Engaging Mentors is organized by Lawrence County School-To-Work, a member of LMMC, which connects students with real-world career options through partnerships with employers and educators.

Those connections are especially important in industries like manufacturing, where many students simply don’t realize how many opportunities are right in front of them.

Today's manufacturing environment relies on advanced technology, problem-solving and teamwork, not outdated stereotypes. Employers across Lawrence and Mercer counties are seeking skilled, motivated talent and are willing to invest in training and career growth.

By highlighting real local success stories and opening doors to nontraditional paths, Girls Engaging Mentors helps young women see that high-quality careers like manufacturing are not only possible, but available right here at home.

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## *Youth Outreach*

### **STEM Competition Seeks Volunteer Judges**

LMMC is encouraging members and partners to volunteer as judges for the inaugural Keystone Competition, a new student-focused STEM event hosted by Midwestern Intermediate Unit 4 on February 17 in Grove City.

The free, one-day competition will bring together students in grades 5 through 12 to work in teams to solve real-world challenges, develop innovative ideas and present their solutions to a panel of judges. The event runs from 9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m., with majority of judging taking place between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.



**Midwestern  
Intermediate  
Unit IV**

The Keystone Competition aligns closely with LMMC's mission to expand career awareness and expose young people to opportunities in manufacturing, engineering and other technical fields.

Interested volunteers should contact Diane McGaffic at [diane.mcgauffic@miu4.org](mailto:diane.mcgauffic@miu4.org).

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## Calendar

- LMMC's Semi-Annual Membership & Community Meeting: April 22 from 8 to 10 a.m.
- Keystone Competition: February 17 from 9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.