

## *Workforce*



## **Taking the Region's Workforce Story to State Legislators**

Earlier this month, the Pennsylvania House Republican Policy Committee convened a "Built in Pennsylvania: Workforce Development in the Trades" hearing in New Castle.

LMMC had two of the most compelling voices in the room.

Board Chair Anna Barenfeld, VP of Strategic Initiatives for ELLWOOD, framed the regional stakes plainly: Lawrence and Mercer counties are losing nearly three-quarters of a percent of their population annually, deaths are outpacing births and the youth are largely unaware of the strength of the local manufacturing industry and the careers it offers.

Against that backdrop, she made the affirmative case. Manufacturing remains the region's strongest opportunity, offering average wages of more than \$35/hour, technology-rich careers and clear advancement pathways unburdened by college debt.

Her challenge to lawmakers: help shift the narrative.

"The demands of today's trades are much more sophisticated and technology-based than ever before – making it more attractive to a modern workforce."

Barenfeld detailed what that looks like at ELLWOOD, from AI safety monitoring to sensor-driven data analysis of production parameters, automation and robotics.

Coalition Manager Julie Michael Smith brought a targeted policy agenda. Her testimony centered on a reality workforce programs have long underestimated: young people don't make career decisions alone.

Parents, coaches, mentors and educators are the true gatekeepers, and many still associate manufacturing with the industry their grandparents left behind.

Smith's recommendations were specific: a Manufacturing Career Awareness Grant Program, a Manufacturing Career

Ambassador Program placing working professionals in schools and communities and a statewide public awareness campaign developed in partnership with industry.

The testimony drew substantive follow-up and a clear need for reform from committee members.

Rep. Marla Brown (New Castle, PA 9th District), who organized the hearing, called skilled trades "the backbone of our economy" and said her sights are set squarely on turning testimony into legislation.

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## Save the Date!

### LMMC's Semi-Annual Membership and Community Meeting

Hear updates on LMMC's workforce and outreach initiatives shaping manufacturing regionally and share your ideas.

-  Wednesday, April 22
-  7:30 - 10:00 AM
-  New Castle School of Trades  
New Castle Location



## LMMC All-Members Meeting Set for April 22

Members, partners and community stakeholders are invited to attend LMMC's Semi-Annual Membership & Community Meeting on Tuesday, April 22.

Networking and coffee will kick off at 7:30 a.m., with the formal meeting running from 8 to 10 a.m. This no-cost event brings together coalition members and community partners to discuss progress, share updates and align priorities shaping the region's manufacturing workforce.

The agenda features a strong lineup of regional voices.

Dr. Joseph McCormick, superintendent of Shenango Area School District, and Brendan Hathaway, junior/senior high school principal

at Wilmington Area School District, will share their visions for preparing today's students for tomorrow's careers.

Max Crumlich, manufacturing partnerships manager at Pennsylvania College of Technology, will highlight its successful Advanced Manufacturing Pre-Apprenticeship, which has 54 local high school students currently enrolled.

Diane McGuffic, educational consultant with Midwest Intermediate Unit 4, and Lynda Jaworski-Rapone, executive director of Lawrence County School-to-Work, will also speak to new ways they are encouraging students to consider manufacturing careers.

The meeting will also feature efforts focused on manufacturing career awareness and ensuring the workforce is manufacturing ready for today's modern environment. These areas remain central to LMMC's mission of building a strong and sustainable manufacturing talent pipeline for the region.

Beyond the formal updates, the meeting serves as a valuable networking opportunity for members to connect, exchange ideas and offer input on the direction of the coalition's work in the months ahead.

Members and community partners are encouraged to mark their calendars and plan to attend.

[RSVP Here](#)

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### Farrell H.S. Hosts First Student Focus Group

If the goal is to reach students, students should shape the message. That's the idea behind LMMC's newly formed Youth-Informed Outreach Committee, and earlier this month, that work got underway.

This month, LMMC's marketing partner, Houck Agency, visited Nicholas Hanahan's Careers 11 class at Farrell High School to conduct LMMC's first student focus group, the pilot session in what will become a broader effort to gather student perspectives across Lawrence and Mercer counties.

Nine juniors participated in a candid, wide-ranging conversation covering how they perceive manufacturing, what they're actually looking for in a career, who shapes their thinking about the future and whether they see themselves staying in the region after graduation.

The students were also asked to name local manufacturers, guess

how many manufacturing companies operate in Mercer County and rate their own interest in pursuing a manufacturing career.

The responses were honest, and in many cases, telling. Students pictured manufacturing as physical, male-dominated work involving heavy machinery and metals, reflecting the kinds of misconceptions the committee is working to understand and address.

When asked what defines a "good job," the answers had little to do with industry and everything to do with fulfillment, relationships and earning enough to enjoy life outside of work.

That kind of insight is exactly what the Youth-Informed Outreach Committee was formed to capture.

The themes, language and perspectives gathered from this session will directly inform how LMMC communicates with young people about manufacturing careers – messaging shaped by students, for students.

For the educators in the room, the conversation was equally meaningful.

"What resonated most was the depth of reflection the students shared," said Dr. Emily Clare, supervisor of curriculum and instruction at Farrell High School. "Hosting this focus group is essential because it shows our students that their perspectives are valued by industry leaders and helps them see themselves as active participants in their future career paths."

This is the first of many focus groups planned across Lawrence and Mercer counties. The conversations are just getting started.

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### New Member Profile: Mahoning County CTC

Mahoning County Career and Technical Center (MCCTC) has joined LMMC as an Education member, bringing a strong commitment to hands-on technical training and workforce preparation to the coalition.

Based in Canfield, Ohio, MCCTC serves students and adults across Mahoning County with career and technical education



programs spanning advanced manufacturing, engineering technologies, health sciences, information technology and more -- preparing the next generation of skilled workers for careers in the region's key industries.

For more than 50 years, MCCTC has partnered with local employers and industry leaders to ensure its curriculum reflects the real-world demands of today's workforce.

Its programs blend classroom instruction with practical, hands-on experience, giving students the tools they need to enter the workforce or continue their education with confidence.

That commitment to meaningful industry partnerships is what brought MCCTC to LMMC.

"We have always been interested in the manufacturing companies in western Pennsylvania, and we were anxious to find an organization that shared the same mission as we do," said

John Zehentbauer, superintendent of MCCTC. "After visiting with LMMC, we could not wait to join and be part of this organization. We are looking forward to great opportunities that exist for our high school and adult learners alike."

LMMC welcomes MCCTC to its growing network of manufacturers, associate partners and education members working together to strengthen the region's manufacturing sector through collaboration, shared expertise and workforce development.

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## Calendar

- LMMC Semi-Annual Membership and Community Meeting: April 22 from 8-10 a.m. (at NCST)
  - What's So Cool About Manufacturing Regional Awards at PSU Shenango: April 9 at 6 p.m.
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## LMMC in the News

- [Policy hearing encourages skilled trades education, workforce - Lancaster Farming](#)
- [Lawrence Mercer Manufacturing Coalition Builds Momentum - The Business Journal](#)

## Members in the News

- [From Ironwork Roots to Modern Manufacturing - The Business Journal](#)