

## *Membership*



### **Member Meeting Highlights Workforce Momentum**

On April 22, LMMC brought manufacturers, educators and community partners together at New Castle School of Trades for its Semi-Annual Meeting, where a clear message emerged: the work of connecting students to careers in this region is gaining traction.

Again and again, the conversation circled back to visibility.

Students are far more likely to imagine a future in manufacturing when they have meaningful chances to see it up close through plant tours, co-ops, internships and hands-on learning.

“Students cannot aspire to what they have never seen,” said Lynda Jaworski-Rapone, executive director at Lawrence County School-To-Work, whose programs now reach students from fifth grade through graduation.

Engagement in those efforts has grown from 39 percent to 70 percent, a sign that early exposure is working.

That same mindset is taking hold in local schools.

Brendan Hathaway of Wilmington Area School District is blending agriculture and manufacturing into hands-on learning, with a new co-op program connecting students directly to employers, such as ELLWOOD Specialty Metals and Ferris Farm.

Students learn maintaining environmental controls, managing robotics, and building equipment which is used in the 100-acre farm adjacent to the district’s K-12 campus.

“You want to get kids off cell phones, give them stuff that’s cool in school so they don’t want to be on their cell phone,” Hathaway said. “It’s simple.”

Still, speakers acknowledged a disconnect between education pathways and workforce demand. Too many students are pushed toward four-year degrees, while high-demand skilled trades go unfilled.

“We send 60% of the kids for 30% of the jobs and 30% of the

kids for 60% of the jobs,” said Dr. Joe McCormick, superintendent of Shenango School District.

Programs like the Advanced Manufacturing Pre-Apprenticeship program, sponsored by Pennsylvania College of Technology and supported by LMMC, are helping close that gap, growing from 12 students to 54 in just two years across Lawrence and Mercer counties.

The Hoyt Foundation also provided a grant to support student stipends this year.

From expanded co-op opportunities to youth outreach, LMMC and its partners are building a system that introduces students to manufacturing earlier and keeps them engaged longer, and it’s starting to take hold.

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*Photo Courtesy of The Business Journal*

## LMMC President Shares Stage at Economic Summit

LMMC President Anna Barenfeld brought manufacturing's message front and center at the fourth annual Mercer County Economic Summit, held April 10 at Grove City College and hosted by Penn-Northwest Development Corp.

Barenfeld, who serves as Vice President of Strategic Initiatives at ELLWOOD, spoke on a panel focused on preparing and attracting tomorrow's workforce, a topic central to LMMC's mission.

She used the occasion to highlight an exciting local connection: components manufactured in the Shenango and Mahoning valleys

were part of the Artemis II spacecraft, the first crewed mission toward the moon since 1972.

"It's just a great example of manufacturing and the future of manufacturing in the United States, and something we can be proud of building," Barenfeld said.

She emphasized that manufacturing support of the Artemis II mission spans companies of all sizes, from small shops to large-scale producers, all connected through the same supply chain.

At the heart of her message was a call to action around youth awareness.

"As a society, I think we've done youth a disservice in not teaching them what is available in manufacturing," she said.

Barenfeld pointed to the importance of creating "wow" moments that inspire young people to explore careers in the trades and advanced manufacturing.

She continues to champion initiatives that connect manufacturers with students, educators and career seekers across Lawrence and Mercer counties.

The summit also featured panels on health care, workforce development and regional economic growth, all underscoring the strength and opportunity that define our region's industrial future.

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*Photo Courtesy of Forward Lawrence*

## **Flowline Receives Economic Development Award**

LMMC member Flowline was recognized with the Economic Development Impact Award at the 10th Annual Impact Awards, hosted by fellow LMMC member Forward Lawrence.

The event celebrates the people, businesses and organizations shaping Lawrence County's future, from new and growing businesses to long-standing employers and the leaders who give their time and talent to strengthen the community.

Flowline has been a stable manufacturing business in Shenango Township for more than 85 years, building a reputation as one of Lawrence County's most respected employers.

Over the past two years, the company has entered a period of

significant growth, driven in large part by new business from the US Navy's Submarine and Aircraft Carrier Program.

In 2025, Flowline constructed a new 20,000 square foot building on its campus to support the Navy program and expand space for shipping, inspection and testing. The company expects to add 30 new employees over the next few years, including welders, machinists and press operators.

Flowline President and LMMC board member Jeff Burns sees continued growth ahead, with a renewed emphasis on domestic manufacturing.

"We're happy to be growing our manufacturing presence in Lawrence County and plan to be here for a very long time," said Burns. "We believe Lawrence County could be ground zero for a new domestic manufacturing renaissance."

Congratulations to the entire Flowline team on this well-deserved recognition.

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## Students Put Local Manufacturers in the Spotlight

LMMC served as a community partner for the 2026 "What's So Cool About Manufacturing?" (WSCM) contest this spring, a statewide middle and high school student video program that connects young people with local manufacturers to explore careers in the industry.

Twelve school teams from across Lawrence and Mercer Counties each partnered with a local manufacturer, spending months researching the company, learning about the work being done and producing a short video documenting what they found.

It is a hands-on process that puts students inside real

manufacturing facilities and in conversation with the people who work there.

Ten LMMC member companies participated this year: Berner International, Ellwood City Forge, Ellwood Crankshaft, Ellwood Specialty Metals, Flowline, G.W. Becker, Hall Manufacturing Technology, Jamestown Coating Technologies, T. Bruce Sales and Wheatland Steel Processing.

For these companies, participation is more than a community gesture. It is an early investment in the next generation of the regional workforce.

The contest wrapped up with an Awards Ceremony on April 9th, where Berner International Plant Manager Joe Miller, board secretary of LMMC and a founding LMMC member, delivered the keynote address. Miller encouraged students to reconsider leaving the region.

"The older I get, the more I realize this is a great place to live," Miller said. "There are great opportunities with manufacturers within the local community."

He also addressed the financial reality of pursuing a manufacturing career, pointing out that apprenticeship programs offered through local manufacturers allow students to earn money while their education is paid for, as well as the ongoing changing perception of the industry.

"It's not the dirty, antiquated, dangerous environment that you may have thought," Miller said. "It's clean environments with robotics and automation, with a lot of opportunities for careers."

For LMMC, programs like WSCM represent exactly the kind of community investment the coalition was built around: getting manufacturers and young people in the same room, early enough to make a difference.

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## *Youth Outreach*



## **Shenango Joins the Conversation**

If the goal is to reach students, students should shape the message.

That's the idea behind LMMC's Youth-Informed Outreach

Committee, and on April 24, that work continued at Shenango Jr./Sr. High School.

LMMC's marketing partner, Houck Agency, visited a wood shop production class to conduct the second student focus group for the committee, building on the momentum of the pilot session at Farrell High School and expanding the effort to gather student perspectives across Lawrence and Mercer counties.

Seventeen students ranging from 10th to 12th grade participated in a candid, wide-ranging conversation covering how they perceive manufacturing, what they look for in a career, who shapes their thinking about the future and whether they see themselves staying in the region after graduation.

The responses were honest and, in many cases, telling.

Students pictured manufacturing as hot, loud factory work with little room for variety or growth, reflecting the kinds of misconceptions the committee is working to understand and address.

When asked what defines a good career, the answers centered on flexibility, work-life balance and the ability to grow.

When it came to researching careers, students pointed to school resources like guidance counselors and career readiness programs as a primary starting point, alongside social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube, valuable signals for how and where they can be reached.

The themes, language and perspectives gathered from this

session will directly inform how LMMC communicates with young people about manufacturing careers.

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## LMMC in the News

- Panel Discuss Successes, Challenges at Mercer County Summit - The Business Journal
- Farrell High School Hosts Student Focus Group on Manufacturing - The Business Journal
- Workforce Development is Key to Manufacturing's Future - The Business Journal
- Manufacturers Coalition Meeting Set for April 22 - The Business Journal
- Building Trades Back Data Center Growth; Workforce Needs Evolve in Manufacturing - The Business Journal
- Where Agriculture and Manufacturing Meet - The Business Journal

## Members in the News

- Impact Awards Honors Lawrence County's Business, Community Leaders - The Business Journal