

Youth Outreach

Talent Factory Launching This Fall to Inspire Next Generation of Manufacturing Talent

LMMC will debut its youth-based initiative, Talent Factory, this fall. Talent Factory is a hands-on, career awareness program designed to equip high school students, young adults aged 16-24 and job seekers with the skills and understanding needed to succeed in modern manufacturing careers.

Talent Factory is the culmination of extensive collaboration among LMMC's manufacturers and education partners.



It reflects the coalition's mission to reshape perceptions of manufacturing and deliver direct, career-connected learning experiences to a new generation of workers.

As a central hub for manufacturing-related resources in Lawrence and Mercer counties, the Talent Factory website will

serve as a matchmaking tool to help schools and employers collaborate on career-connected learning. It will also house information on local training programs, manufacturing career paths and opportunities for engagement such as tours, classroom visits, pre-apprenticeships and more.

“Too many students and jobseekers in our region still don’t see manufacturing as a viable option, even though these careers offer great wages, upward mobility and long-term security,” said Anna Barenfeld, VP of Strategic Initiatives at ELLWOOD and LMMC board president. “Talent Factory is our way of closing that awareness gap and offering a clear entry ramp into the field.”

The initiative will launch in partnership with several schools and employers and will serve both in-school youth and adults looking to enter or reenter the workforce. Its flexible format is designed to meet participants where they are and connect them directly with employers ready to hire.

Manufacturers and educators interested in participating or learning more are encouraged to contact Julie Michael Smith at julie@lawrencemercermfg.com.

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If you were forwarded this email and would like to receive LMMC’s newsletter directly, please send your name, company affiliation and email address to jim@houckpr.com.

Welding Internship Offers Real-World Learning at Flowline

A new workforce initiative is coming to LMMC this year, aimed at preparing jobseekers for careers in modern manufacturing and giving employers a pipeline of ready-to-work talent.

The MFG Readiness program is a four-week, full-time training with a stipend for participants. It is an industry-backed model designed to equip participants with the essential skills, work habits and career awareness they need to enter and advance in the manufacturing sector. Already proven successful in neighboring regions, the program is being tailored specifically to the needs of employers in Lawrence and Mercer counties.

LMMC leaders discussed the program at a recent board meeting, where members expressed strong support for introducing this model to the region. The program will target young adults, recent high school graduates and jobseekers who are unemployed, underemployed or exploring a career change. MFG Readiness will offer them a short-term, intensive training experience focused on the practical and soft skills today's manufacturers are looking for.

“This is not a traditional classroom program,” said Dave Douglass, MFG Readiness committee chair and LMMC board officer. “It’s a hands-on, employer-informed training that helps participants get up to speed quickly and feel confident stepping into a manufacturing environment.”

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MFG Readiness will be offered at [Butler County Community College](#)’s new Shenango Commons campus in New Castle. BC3 will sponsor the pre-apprenticeship program and provide the manufacturing training. LMMC will work with regional organizations and [PA CareerLink](#) for the life/soft skills and job/career readiness support. With LMMC manufacturing members committed creating real-world experiences, hands on activities and plant tours, graduates of the program will be prepared for entry-level roles and will have the opportunity to be hired directly into participating manufacturers.

More details, including how to enroll and how manufacturers can get involved, will be announced in coming months. For now, LMMC encourages interested employers, schools and community partners to stay tuned and help spread the word about this exciting new opportunity.

To learn more, contact Julie Michael Smith at julie@lawrencemercermfg.com.

Manufacturing Camp Brings Students to ELLWOOD

Local students got a rare look inside one of the region's largest and most advanced manufacturing operations this summer as part of United Way of Mercer County's new Advanced Manufacturing and Robotics Camp.

The students, participating in a weeklong "career studio," toured both the Hermitage and Sharon plants of [ELLWOOD Crankshaft Group](#), where



they observed industrial processes up close and learned how raw materials are transformed into precision-engineered components used around the world.

This summer marks the first time advanced manufacturing has been included in [United Way's](#) "Teens to Careers" series of summer programs.

Traditionally focused on industries like healthcare and culinary arts, the studios are an extension of United Way's year-round afterschool program, which gives high school students the opportunity to explore in-demand careers through hands-on learning.

The addition of a manufacturing component this year was made possible through a PA Industry Partnership grant secured by [West Central Job Partnership](#). LMMC served as a key partner in launching and partially funding this program.

“Advanced manufacturing plays such a vital role in our local economy, and this program gave students a chance to see that firsthand,” said Julie Michael Smith, coalition manager for LMMC. “We want them to understand that these are real, rewarding career options available right here at home.”

In addition to the ELLWOOD site visits, students in the program participated in hands-on robotics and STEM activities designed to spark interest in automation, engineering and skilled trades.

LMMC’s mission aligns with this effort by building stronger connections between employers, educators and community organizations to address workforce needs and promote modern manufacturing careers.

As demand continues to grow for skilled workers in the industry, programs like these are helping prepare the next generation for future opportunities that start with awareness, experience and a glimpse of what’s possible.



Advanced Manufacturing Pre-Apprenticeship Program Celebrates Student Success

Nearly 25 high school students from Lawrence County were recognized June 20 at the Lawrence County Courthouse for completing Penn College of Technology's (PCT) pre-apprenticeship program.

Funded through a U.S. Department of Labor grant, the program is offered at no cost to students and coordinated locally by Forward Lawrence.

LMMC supported the effort by connecting its members for field trips and guest speakers, while also providing student stipends.

Students from Neshannock, LCCTC, Union, Laurel, Shenango and New Castle participated in the program, which is designed to provide foundational exposure to high-demand careers and apprenticeship opportunities. Thirteen students successfully passed ToolingU's Certified Manufacturing-Associate industry recognized credential.

Judy Shaffer, recently retired President of ELLWOOD Specialty Metals, gave the keynote address, sharing practical wisdom from her decades of leadership. She stressed the importance of three key traits in the workplace: knowledge, effort and attitude.

“You can have all the knowledge in the world, but without effort and the right attitude, success is going to be a challenge,” Shaffer said.

Anna Barenfeld, VP of strategic initiatives at [ELLWOOD](#), board president of LMMC and a longtime regional workforce advocate, welcomed guests wearing three hats: as a family business owner, ELLWOOD executive and community leader.



“Our commitment to our youth and community is embedded in every role I play,” Barensfeld said.

Parent Erin Miller shared her appreciation for the program, calling [Lawrence County Career and Technical Center](#) (LCCTC) a hidden gem. Her daughter, Jhenavesza Miller, recently graduated and has already been hired as a vinyl extrusion apprentice with [Veka Plastics](#). She will soon represent LCCTC in a national competition in Atlanta.

Nathan Hill, a rising senior at Laurel High School, enrolled in the program to explore his options.

“I’m still figuring things out, but now I’m seriously considering manufacturing,” he said. “It really opened my eyes.”

With around 40 attendees, including family members, educators and employers, the event also spotlighted student Hayden Daviduk, who landed a part-time welding job after connecting with LMMC member [Flowline Fittings](#) during the program’s hands-on labs.

The [PCT](#) pre-apprenticeship program is one more example of how regional partners are creating real career pathways for students close to home. There are hopes to expand the program into Mercer County next school year, giving even more students the opportunity to explore careers in manufacturing.

Membership



Advanced Manufacturing Pre-Apprenticeship Program Celebrates Student Success

G.W. Becker, Inc., a keystone founding member of LMMC, recently celebrated 45 years in business with an open house that highlighted both the company's legacy and its future.

The Hermitage-based overhead crane manufacturer welcomed employees, families, community partners and industry exhibitors for an afternoon of tours, food trucks, networking, prize giveaways and family-friendly activities. The event also marked the first opportunity to officially showcase [G.W. Becker's](#) facility expansion and capital equipment upgrades completed in 2020.

Originally slated to coincide with the completion of the company's expanded office and production space, the celebration was delayed due to COVID-19. Company leadership waited until it could safely bring the community together to commemorate the milestone.

Visitors toured the updated facility and learned about the company's recent addition of four new CNC machines, which have increased their internal capacity and broadened manufacturing capabilities. While most of the event took place at the Hermitage headquarters, Becker said the upgrades extended to their nearby fabrication facility as well.

The company's focus wasn't just on its equipment, but on its people.

“It’s about getting together with family and friends and showing appreciation to our employees and customers,” said Chris Becker, president of G.W. Becker and vice president of LMMC. “We’ve made major investments in capital equipment and wanted to showcase that but also give employees a sense of pride and accomplishment by seeing the results firsthand.”

The open house served as both a thank-you and a reintroduction, demonstrating the company’s ongoing investment in its people, technology and regional manufacturing leadership.

Membership

New Member Spotlight: Strategic Early Warning Network

The Strategic Early Warning (SEWN) Network, a program of the Steel Valley Authority, is bringing decades of statewide experience in layoff aversion and business stabilization to the LMMC as a new member.

Launched in response to industrial decline in the Western Pennsylvania region, the Steel Valley Authority has helped save more than 34,000 jobs across Pennsylvania. Its SEWN initiative is a national model for layoff prevention, offering free and confidential consulting to manufacturers and related industries statewide.

SEWN's services include financial and operational restructuring, market repositioning, ownership



transitions and high-performance workplace strategies. These tools align closely with the needs of manufacturers navigating today's complex labor and economic conditions.

LMMC In The News

- [MVMC Members Go to Summer Camp](#) (Business Journal)