October 30, 2025

Membership

LMMC Semi-Annual Meeting Builds Momentum for Manufacturing Workforce Solutions

More than 60 manufacturers, educators, workforce partners and community leaders gathered October 7 at Mercer County

Career Center for LMMC's Semi-Annual Membership & Community Meeting.

The event offered updates on ongoing workforce initiatives and invited attendees to help shape next steps for strengthening manufacturing readiness and career awareness across the region.

"We still need a very talented, hardworking, earnest workforce who's going to take us into tomorrow," said Anna Barensfeld, vice president of strategic initiatives at ELLWOOD and president of LMMC. "We offer great paying careers with wonderful benefits, but we need to do a better job of getting that message out."

Attendees learned about two cornerstone programs. Manufacturing Readiness, a four-week pre-apprenticeship program developed by LMMC members and sponsored by Butler County Community College, prepares participants for entry-level production roles through technical and soft-skill training.

Talent Factory, LMMC's youth and career-awareness initiative, connects manufacturers with schools, students and parents to build understanding of modern manufacturing careers.

Breakout sessions encouraged collaboration and feedback. In the "Manufacturing Readiness and Employee Support" discussion, participants emphasized reinforcing professionalism, communication and reliability in training, along with leadership development for new supervisors and career-path visuals to highlight advancement potential.

They also discussed piloting an Employee Resource Network to connect workers to local support services that improve retention.

In the "Career Awareness and Engagement" session, participants endorsed bringing the “Ready or Not” financial literacy and career simulation into schools and expanding outreach to parents, coaches and counselors as key career influencers. They also supported adding video storytelling and lifestyle-focused content to LMMC’s Talent Factory website.

Feedback from these sessions will help guide LMMC’s action teams as they continue developing programs that prepare, support and inspire the region’s next-generation manufacturing workforce.

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WSCM School and Manufacturing Pairings Announced for the 2026 Video Contest

Middle and high school students from across Mercer and Lawrence counties are once again taking cameras into local workplaces for the West Central (PA) “What’s So Cool About Manufacturing?” video contest. The program connects students with area employers to showcase modern manufacturing and spark interest in hands-on, high-tech careers close to home.

Each school team partners with a manufacturer to plan, film and edit a short video highlighting what makes their assigned company “cool.” The videos will be posted online this winter for public voting in the Viewers Choice competition and evaluated by a panel of judges for additional awards.

The video contest has seen a significant increase in participation in comparison to the seven schools that participated in last year’s contest.

This year’s participating schools and manufacturers are:

- Farrell Area High School – ELLWOOD Crankshaft
- Grove City Area Middle School – T. Bruce Sales
- Hickory High School – Wheatland Tube
- Kennedy Catholic – Jamestown Coating Technologies
- Lakeview Middle School – Wheatland Steel Processing

- New Castle – Flowline Fittings
- Reynolds Junior/Senior High School – Hall Manufacturing Technologies
- Riverside – ELLWOOD City Forge
- Sharpsville Area Middle School – G.W. Becker Crane
- Sharon Middle School – Sharon Tube
- Union – Berner International
- West Middlesex Area Middle School – Imperial Systems
- Wilmington – ELLWOOD Specialty Metals

"What's So Cool About Manufacturing?" is coordinated locally by LMMC and Penn-Northwest's Homegrown Initiative with support from West Central Job Partnership.

Workforce

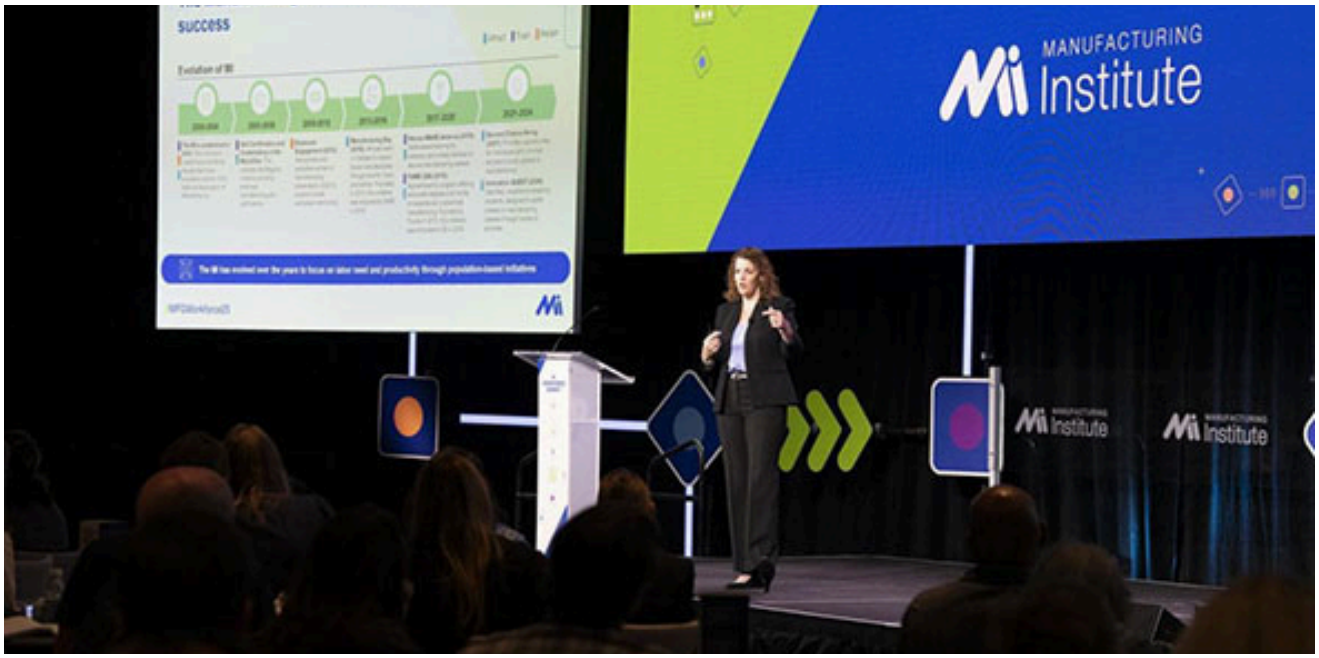

Photo Courtesy of The Manufacturing Institute - TMI

Workforce Summit Reinforces Shared Goals of Manufacturers

More than 300 manufacturers, workforce leaders and subject-matter experts gathered in Charlotte, North Carolina, for Manufacturing Institute's (MI) annual Workforce Summit.

The two-day event featured informative presentations and breakout sessions packed with actionable strategies and ideas that participants could bring back to their home regions, including western Pennsylvania.

Among the attendees were Dena Baptiste of ELLWOOD Group, LMMC member, and Julie Michael Smith, coalition manager for LMMC, representing the region's manufacturers on the national stage.

Discussions focused on apprenticeships to address misperceptions about manufacturing, a growing emphasis on skills-based hiring and the use of artificial intelligence to bridge the workforce skills gap.

Attendees explored how AI is best viewed as a problem-solving tool rather than a replacement for workers, and how mentorships and industry partnerships can help engage, support and retain today's workforce by adapting to its changing needs.

Large and small manufacturers shared practical workforce strategies, including Armstrong World Industries, The Timken Company, McKinsey, Autodesk, Deloitte, Textron and Honda.

Textron highlighted its one-stop employment center, which also serves as a hub for youth engagement, while Honda shared new approaches for recruiting and connecting with young jobseekers.

A highlight of the summit was MI's introduction of Innovator Quest, a new interactive board game that allows middle school students to "run" a virtual manufacturing company, an engaging way to spark early interest in industry careers.

"The conversations and ideas we heard reaffirm that we're on the right track," said Michael Smith. "Manufacturers nationwide are facing the same challenges we are in western Pennsylvania, and partnerships and shared action are key to ensuring opportunity for all."

Workforce

Tuition-Free Training Kickstarts Manufacturing Careers

A highlight of the summit was MI's introduction of Innovator Quest, a new interactive board game that allows middle school students to "run" a virtual manufacturing company, an engaging way to spark early interest in industry careers.

The 12-hour workshop, funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration Grant, is designed to introduce participants to the technologies and skills shaping the future of manufacturing.

Topics include automation, robotics and digital or "smart" manufacturing systems, fields driving major growth among

regional employers.

The course will be held in-person December 2–4, from 4:30 to 8:30 p.m. each evening. Snacks and beverages will be provided. All fees are fully covered by grant funding, eliminating financial barriers for those interested in exploring a rewarding, high-demand career path.

A virtual information session is scheduled for Thursday, November 6, from 12-12:30 p.m. via Zoom, where attendees can learn more about the course and how it connects to future employment and training opportunities in advanced manufacturing.

Registration is now open for both the virtual info session and the December course.

Membership

New Member Profile: Gilbert's Risk Solutions

Gilbert's Risk Solutions has joined LMMC as an Associate member, adding expertise in business insurance, employee benefits and risk management.

Based in Sharon, the firm serves clients across multiple industries, including manufacturing, with customized strategies to protect operations and strengthen long-term resilience.

Founded in 1854, Gilbert's Risk Solutions has grown from a local insurance agency into a regional leader recognized for its innovative approach to managing risk and supporting client success.

Its specialized services for manufacturers include safety program development, compliance assistance and proactive risk analysis to improve workplace protection and efficiency.

"Gilbert's Risk Solutions is pleased to join LMMC to support the regional manufacturing industry with tailored innovative risk management solutions," said Brad Mantzell, vice president of Gilbert's Risk Solutions. "Backed by more than a century of experience in the manufacturing sector, we remain dedicated to supporting the growth and advancement of the region's manufacturing workforce."

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

LMMC In The News

- Lawrence Mercer Coalition Pushes to Build Next-Gen Manufacturing Workforce - The Business Journal
- LMMC Focuses on Strengthening Manufacturing Workforce - The Business Journal

- Organizations Tackle Challenges Facing Manufacturers - The Business Journal
- Student Video Contest Expanding into Lawrence County - The Business Journal

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Calendar

- Intro to Advanced Manufacturing Virtual Information Session: Nov. 6 at 12:00 p.m.
- Introduction to Advanced Manufacturing In-Person Course: Dec. 2 - 4 at Penn State Beaver