

Manufacturing Week encourages students to pursue manufacturing careers

By Tara Marion

From February 18 to 23, select manufacturers from nine counties in Southwestern Michigan—Allegan, Barry, Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph and Van Buren—will participate in Southwest Michigan Manufacturing Week (SMMW).

Patrick Hill, senior manufacturing consultant at Pharmacia, 7000 Portage Rd., said this special week was set aside to create an awareness among K-12 students of the large manufacturing base in southwestern Michigan and that careers in manufacturing are another option when considering plans for their futures, an alternative to a four-year degree program.

Hill went on to explain that SMMW came about because most of the manufacturing companies in the area are having trouble recruiting skilled workers to work at all levels, whether it be on the factory floor or in the skilled trades.

As Tamara Davis, project manager for Regional EDGE, 1327 Academy St. explained, “SMMW seeks to change the image of manufacturing, particularly in the eyes of junior high and high school students, their families and school counselors, to ultimately provide manufacturers in the region with skilled workers.”

To accomplish this goal, there are a variety of opportunities for students and manufacturers alike to get involved in activities throughout the week. There are speaking engagements at local schools, open houses and tours, marketing and educational materials available to schools throughout southwestern Michigan and a manufacturing expo and career fair, which Hill referred to as “the highlight at the end.”

Representatives from some of southwestern Michigan’s manufacturing companies will speak at the region’s K-12 schools. Last year, for example, a representative from Contempo Colors, (which is now American Greetings), showed students what a four-color process job looked like when the cyan plate was not used. (Cyan blue is one of the four colors used in the process; the other three are magenta, yellow and black).

“This is a hands-on speaking engagement where the person actually brought products that they manufactured for the students to touch,” said Davis. “They were able to hand out napkins and cups.”

Other manufacturing companies will open their doors to students who are interested in tours so that the K-12 community can see firsthand what it’s like to work in a manufacturing environment.

To educate K-12 students about the available career opportunities in the manufacturing field, marketing/educational materials are free of charge to regional schools. Davis said teachers can tie them in with their teaching on manufacturing concepts.

As Hill mentioned, the highlight of the week is the manufacturing expo and career fair, which will be hosted by Kalamazoo Community College’s M-TEC from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., over 30 representatives from manufacturing companies (some of which include Triple S Plastics, Dana Corp., Weber Specialties and Stryker Instruments) will display their products and describe their facilities to K-12 students and teachers.

“The primary focus is really to create an awareness (among students) so they can be planning their curriculum and some of their work experiences in thinking about entering manufacturing and pursuing career,” Hill said.

That same day at 7 p.m., the expo opens to the public as a career fair for anyone wishing to submit an application.

Representatives from Michigan Works! will also teach attendants how to search for a job, write a cover letter and resume and how to prepare for an interview.