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Open Houses Mark Nat'l Manufacturing Day

by Jim Curley

Boxmakers from Hawaii to Maine (literally) were among the more than 1,600 manufacturers nationwide that opened their doors to demonstrate the potential of 21st century manufacturing, tout the transformation of manufacturing into an industry of innovation, and foster interest in the rewarding careers available in this growing sector.

The third annual National Manufacturing Day (NMD) was held on Friday, October 3. Barry Miller, President of the Delaware Valley Industrial Resource Center (DVIRC), a Philadelphia, Pennsylvania based economic development organization committed to assisting small and medium-size manufacturing enterprises compete and grow in the global economy, explained that NMD was begun to counter two mistaken impressions: that U.S. manufacturing is dead and that the only way to get a good job in the U.S. is to go to college.

"Nothing could be further from the truth," Miller said. "Today, the revitalized manufacturing sector is a leader in innovation and advanced technology. And the high-tech nature of U.S. manufacturing is spurring the 'reshoring' phenomenon of recent years.

"Manufacturing is exciting," he added. "And there are plenty of good well-paying jobs in manufacturing that require technical skills, but do not require a four-year college degree."

Miller noted that 14 DVIRC clients hosted open houses on October 3, up from eight last year. Among these was the Rodon Group, in Hatfield, Pennsylvania,

a plastic injection molding company that was visited by the U.S. Commerce Department's Chief Economist Dr. Sue Helper and Acting Manufacturing Extension Partnership Director Phil Singerman.



Jeff Bittner, Acme's New Product Development Manager, shows Open House attendees his company's initiatives in lightweighting and other packaging breakthroughs.

Among the DVIRC first-time hosts of the open house was Acme Corrugated Box in Hatboro, Pennsylvania. Acme employees took about 100 guests, including customers, suppliers, government officials, students and others, on one-hour tours that stressed the technologies of today's corrugator and sheet plants.

A highlight was a visit to Acme's education center, which trains new and long-time employees on continuous improvement and on both theory and technology in its "Acme University" courses. Participants also visited Acme's corrugator control room, various board

and product testing labs, and studied some of the company's latest innovations.

They also met with Jeff Bittner, Acme's New Product Development Manager, who showed how technological know-how and modern equipment has enabled



21st century technology covers all aspects of boxmaking, as Bay Cities' COO Brett Kirkpatrick shows how computers fitted on forklift trucks keep track of finished goods inventory.

Acme to "right-package" innovative products for its customers, often providing them with a stronger box at a lower cost.

"I was very impressed," said Brian Kitchen, Tax Manager at Kreischer Miller, an accounting firm with no business affiliation with Acme. "During the tour, it became obvious that the process of making a box at Acme is heavily reliant on up-to-date technology, as well as employee knowledge and teamwork."

"I was surprised at how highly automated Acme was," said Michael Taylor, Purchasing Manager for Medical Products Laboratory. "It seemed that all of Acme's people were on the same page, working for each other to bring their cohesive ideas to life through technology. That was very impressive."

Wilmington Box Co., a unit of Richmond Corrugated, gave its Open House attendees a peek into how a corrugated manufacturer stays relevant by expanding services to its customers.

Visitors toured Wilmington's Packaging 151 facility in Burgaw, North Carolina. The building and the capabilities contained inside allow Wilmington to offer custom crates, pallets, assembled products, fulfillment processes and polyethylene foam conversion to its box customers.

On Oahu, Rengo Packaging Hawaii marked National Manufacturing Day with tours of its facility. When Rengo's new facility opened in July, it marked the return of box manufacturing on the island after an absence of six years.

At a ceremony marking the opening, Kirk Caldwell, Mayor of Honolulu, noted, "Manufacturing [in Hawaii] is growing significantly year on year," adding, "Your investment not only helps the local economy; it also

helps secure the future of the families of those you employ."

Jim Keller, Rengo Packaging Hawaii's Managing Director, and others started a distribution company to provide islanders with boxes after the sole boxmaker left Hawaii. The new company now has 49 employees in its one-shift operation, Keller noted. "We've got a great group of people here," he added. "We offer family-wage manufacturing jobs, and that made us very attractive to the local government."

Recruiting Opportunity

During its celebration of National Manufacturing Day, Pico Rivera, California based Bay Cities hosted a mixed group of about 50 attendees - from chamber of commerce representatives to students in high school



Volk Package Design Manager Kevin Shea demonstrates computer-aided design to Maine middle-schoolers on 2013's Job Shadow Day.

and trade schools. "We had also hosted a group of AICC members earlier in the week, so it was a busy time," said Bay Cities' President and new AICC Chairman Greg Tucker. "But it was a great day."

"I was especially happy to see several female students on the tour," he said. "One of our most recent hires had worked for Boeing, and she talked about the experience of being a woman in a manufacturing environment and the opportunities manufacturing might hold for women. Her talk was well received." A plant tour was also included in the day's events.

Derek Volk, President of Volk Container, Biddeford, Maine, hosts a radio show called Box Talk Radio. On a recent show, Marion Sprague from the Manufacturing Association of Maine spoke about the then upcoming National Manufacturing Day in the Pine Tree State. Sprague noted that 22 NMD events would take place in Maine, up from seven in 2013. She added, "We have geared the program to our high schools, but we have also outreached to middle schools. It's a good fit for schools like Portland High School, which has an engineering class, and trade schools that have machining classes."

Never Too Young

On National Manufacturing Day, Volk Packaging

hosted about 25 people, including some educators. Lest employers think middle school is too early to educate young people about manufacturing, each winter Volk Packaging also hosts what Derek Volk calls a Job Shadow Day, a Junior Achievement event.

Area middle schoolers come to Volk Packaging and “shadow” a Volk employee for a day. They design boxes, schedule production, cost out jobs and perform other boxplant tasks. The lessons sometimes stick, Volk reports. “I was recently talking to the mother of a young girl who attended Job Shadow Day several



‘Manufacturing no longer means mindless work in a dark dingy place. We need talented, educated and trained people, and we’re willing to pay for it.’

— Bob Cohen

years ago,” he remembers. “The girl, who ‘shadowed’ our human resources manager, is now a sophomore in high school, and when her mother recently asked her what she wanted to be, she answered ‘a human resource manager,’ a job she ‘shadowed’ a few years earlier.

“Too often our young people see manufacturing as dirty, boring, old school, and non high-tech, and that’s so untrue,” Volk said.

Unique Partnership

Also celebrating National Manufacturing Day (with a trip to the Simeone Automotive Museum in Philadelphia) were students in a unique university-high school-industry collaboration.

Earlier this year, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania based West Catholic Prep High School, in collaboration with Drexel University, launched an Engineering Technology Academy at the high school. The initiative will pro-

vide a select group of students with the opportunity to acquire basic engineering skills through a project-based curriculum that includes art, mathematics, computer programming and physics. Twenty-three West Catholic freshman are in the initial Engineering Technology Academy class.

In each year of the four-year program, students will be assigned projects that will require them to learn and apply CAD skills to manufacture designs using on-site equipment and then articulate the principles that enabled their designs to work.

“We want to expose these students to the engineering and technology of modern industry and, if they so choose, take the option to move from our prep school directly into industry,” said Paul Colistra, Vice President of Institutional Advancement at West Catholic. “They will have the general Catholic values-centered education with a basic knowledge of engineering and technology. It will be like graduating from high school with a major.”

Colistra lauded industry and in specific the DVIRC and its member companies for their support of this program. “The industry commitment has been great. We hope that they will be able to offer summer internships when our students complete their junior year.”

In order to help ensure a supply of tech-savvy young people, Acme’s Bob Cohen has made a “personal funding commitment to West Catholic and its engineering program in conjunction with Drexel University,” he said. “My hope is to use them as a ‘farm team’ for employees who actually want to be in manufacturing and have training and skills associated with the program’s training.

“Too often, people come to manufacturing by default,” Cohen said. “Manufacturing no longer means mindless work in a dark dingy place. We need talented, educated and trained people, and we’re willing to pay for it.”