

Manufacturing event is a learning experience for local students

Written by Jessica Dandoy
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Local manufacturers, health care organizations, and colleges lined the walls of the Slippery Rock High School gymnasium Friday for the school's first all-day career development event.

Sponsored by the Butler County Manufacturing Consortium (BCMC), the event allowed companies and schools to connect with students about viable career opportunities and degree options.

Jim Ferguson, human resources manager at Penn United and chairman of BCMC, addressed each group of student as they entered the gym.

"These businesses are simply the best here in Butler," said Ferguson.

Ferguson planned the event with Slippery Rock guidance Counselors Andy Johnson and Stephanie Karwoski after the school joined BCMC as a resource partner.

"Slippery Rock High School has an excellent approach to career education," said Ferguson.

Johnson and Karwoski emphasized a career focus spread throughout the school's curriculum and hope to build a strong awareness of local career opportunities among students.

"Many students want to enter the world of work, but don't know what's out there. This event allows for a captive audience," said Karwoski.

Scott Dietz, Manager of Education Initiatives for Catalyst Connection, attends a variety of career development events at local high schools and colleges. These events help him drive students to the career center of his company's website.

"You might hear people say there are no local job opportunities, but the industry is screaming for talent," said Dietz.

He mentioned the high number of opportunities arising with the new Westinghouse plant being built in Butler County.

Sophomore Colt McDeavitt is two years away from graduation, but was able to collect valuable information for future consideration.

"Manufacturing is interesting, but I'm not decided on any set career," said McDeavitt.

McDeavitt represents the best type of student for these kinds of events: Those open to opportunities. Students are not only informed of career opportunities, but learn about the field through conversation and demonstration that may spark their interest.

Dave Gass, Career Consultant at Robert Morris, helps students identify their skills and how they translate into a career. "These types of events help students to bridge the gap between high school, college, and career," said Gass. "It answers the questions 'what do I want to do?' and 'how do I get there?'"

Robert Morris University displayed a FANUC Robot next to their information table. The LR mate 200iB/5P, with six moving joints, displayed and restacked small metal blocks that spelled out "Robert Morris University."

In industry, the robot is used for high-precision applications such as the load and unload, assembly, and removal of various materials.

Chuck Davies of Sonneborn, based in Petrolia, displayed a variety of end products from makeup to furniture polish. Sonneborn, a manufacturer of oils and waxes, offered students an idea of how raw materials are used in the creation of products from start to finish.

"Not enough students know what industries are in their backyard," said Davies.

Butler County is one of the biggest manufacturing counties in the state, with 300 manufacturers and around 13,000 jobs. The average county wage is \$48,000 -- more than twice the average retail salary.

Kristen Bastaja of Penn United and BCMC dispels the historical stereotype of manufacturing.

"This isn't your grandfather's industry. Manufacturing offers a very clean, high-tech environment," said Bastaja. BCMC's goal is to promote the manufacturing and health care fields as offering not just jobs, but as high-demand, family-sustaining careers.

"We hope this event is a springboard for developing relationships with other high schools," said Ferguson.

Robert Morris University, Slippery Rock University, and Butler County Community College attended the event to promote degree and certificate options for students. In addition, the manufacturing industry allows for on-the-job training and co-op education opportunities for advanced career placement.

"These events help students consider their options and develop a positive mindset about wanting to learn what is happening in the region," said Dietz.

One way counselors Johnson and Karwoski will measure the success of the event is through a student survey. Students will be given the opportunity to provide feedback and suggestions for future career events.

For more information on the BCMC, visit butlercountymfg.org.

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