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Manufacturers target new workforce

Dayton Business Journal - September 29, 2006 by [Tracy Kershaw-Staley](#) DBJ Staff Report

Mike Collinsworth constantly is interviewing for new employees at his company, Custom Manufacturing Solutions.

Problem is, few candidates have the necessary skills, particularly young people, needed to replace retiring workers, he said.

These days, many consider manufacturing to be unappealing, dirty and unstable. Haunted by headlines announcing plant closures, layoffs and outsourcing, few people would imagine healthy manufacturing companies actually looking to hire.

To help attract more skilled applicants, Collinsworth and others are trying to spread the message that manufacturing is alive. He's among the local manufacturing leaders raising money to launch a campaign called, "Dream it. Do it."

The campaign, designed by the National Association of Manufacturers, will cost \$600,000. It will include billboards, bus and newspaper advertisements, and TV and radio spots designed to convince young people and their parents that manufacturing is a viable career. The campaign will feature networking and educational events and facilities tours.

The national association ran a pilot of "Dream It. Do It" last year in Kansas City, Mo., and hopes to do it again in six other markets, including Dayton. Dayton's campaign could launch in early 2007, said Angela Erbaugh, executive director of the Dayton Tooling and Manufacturing Association.

"I really believe the industry needs to attract people into manufacturing," said Collinsworth, whose firm has grown from 35 to 90 employees in recent years.

Here's why: If local manufacturers can't find skilled workers, they won't be able to accept new work, which could become another force driving work overseas, said Rich Porter, a local manufacturer and chairman of Dayton's "Dream It. Do It" campaign.

Although many manufacturing jobs are leaving the United States, statistics indicate there will be jobs in the future for skilled workers, who often command salaries above \$50,000.

According to the National Manufacturing Association's 2005 Skills Gap Report, 90 percent of those taking the survey said they see a moderate to severe shortage of qualified skilled-production employees including machinists, operators, craft workers, distributors and technicians. Engineers and scientists are also in short supply.

Porter, president of Dayton's C.B. Manufacturing, is emblematic of that trend. He spent the summer trying to fill four positions with a machinist and grinder operators.

A search that would traditionally take a month turned into four months of hunting for the right folks, he said.

"The threat is that it will become a self-fulfilling prophesy: That more jobs will leave the country because we can't fill the jobs within the country," Porter said.



Colleen Kelley

Generation gap: (left to right) Jim Baxia, director of quality and engineering; Michael Collinsworth, president; Greg Hyman, manufacturing engineer; and Steve Cochran, manufacturing engineer for Custom Manufacturing Solutions. The engineers are mentoring high school students to boost interest.

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Porter said his conversations with manufacturing leaders revealed the same things: That companies need people who can read blueprints, understand computers, work machines and work in teams.

The "Dream It. Do It" campaign coalesces with another project trying to raise awareness.

BattleBots IQ pairs local companies with high school students to build remote-controlled robots that will clash in competition at the DTMA's Advanced Manufacturing and Technology Show in October. Companies paid \$1,000 and donated workers' time to sponsor a robot. Students have visited the manufacturing facilities, learning what it is like to be inside a 21st century plant.

Collinsworth, who has two engineers working with a BattleBot team, believes there will be jobs for years to come for skilled workers.

"I want the students to find out what their niche is and go for it," he said. "I just want to expose them to manufacturing."

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