

Manufacturing Day in Oakland County

By Jim Newell, Review Editor | October 12, 2017



For Justin Jackson, a senior at Lake Orion High School, seeing what the professional welders at MPD Welding, Inc. do could be a glimpse into his future.

Jackson and 12 of his classmates toured MPD Welding in Orion Township as part of Oakland County's third annual Manufacturing Day on Oct. 6.

"I've always had an interest in anything that moves, anything mechanized. So, I figured, why not make a career out of something that you love," said Jackson, who also is taking classes at Oakland Community College and plans to pursue a career in manufacturing after graduation.

And that's what county executives had hoped for – to pair students interested in pursuing a career in the skilled trades and manufacturing industry with local businesses and retain skilled professionals in Oakland County.

"The goal of our third annual Manufacturing Day in Oakland County is to inspire our young people to pursue careers in manufacturing and the skilled trades," County Executive L. Brooks Patterson said in a news release.

"There are a lot of great, in-demand jobs available in our region and this event helps introduce them to these opportunities. It's an exciting day for all those who participate – the students, their teachers and the manufacturers who host the tours," Patterson said.

High school students from Oakland Schools' four technical campuses and other local schools visited 35 high-tech manufacturing locations as part of National Manufacturing Day.

Instructor Steve Langdon, who took the students on the Manufacturing Day visit to MPD Welding, said the welding class at Oakland Technical Campus Southeast helps prepare the kids for entry level into the welding industry.

"We do approach the skill level that these guys (MPD Welding) need for their skill level," Langdon said. "Ethan Zingler, a Lake Orion graduate who came through our program the first year, works here now."

Nikolas Chiesa, a senior at Oxford High School, said he liked that at MPD Welding he got to see different types of welding and see not only the parts, but learned where they are shipped to and the work is part of a whole.

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"I've just always enjoyed fire, hot metal. I like working with my hands, so after I graduate I want to go into something in welding and make things," Chiesa said.

For Richard Bondar, president of MPD Welding, Manufacturing Day is a chance to inform students about what his company does and get a glimpse of the prospective employees.

"This is our third year hosting. It's been pretty good. I've enjoyed it, getting to meet the students," Bondar said. "We decided to do this because it's hard to find good people. And most of your up-and-coming crowd doesn't think about manufacturing as a profession.

"Kids in the trade programs get to come and see that there is more to the manufacturing industry, and you can make a decent living at it."

Bondar said when many students think of welding that they picture welding two pieces of pipe together – a misconception about what MPD Welding really does.

"What we do here is much more advanced," he said. "Primarily we do automotive and aerospace (welding). A little bit of military and medical, too. We're kind of an all-around company."

More than two-thirds of the 13 students who visited MPD said they were thinking about a career in manufacturing after graduation.

"If you like fast-paced jobs, this is it. If you like welding, if you like heat, this is a great job," plant manager Jerry Lilly told the students, adding that MPD welders work with iron, alloyed steel, aluminum, titanium and a variety of metals. "Our welders have a very good background in metallurgy and understand the different types of metals.

"It's a little bit of a pressure business. Most of our stuff in turnaround is 24 hours, so you're constantly working on different things," Lilly said.

Bondar's father started MPD Welding, a tool and die company, in 1974 in Madison with a workforce of six employees in a 3,500-square foot building.

The company moved to Orion Township in 1991 and has grown into a 14,000 square foot facility with over 40 technicians.

According to a survey of 1,400 Manufacturing Day 2016 participants from across the country:

90 percent thought the Manufacturing Day activities were interesting and engaging.

84 percent said that they were now more aware of manufacturing jobs in their communities.

81 percent thought manufacturing provides careers that are interesting and rewarding.

62 percent were more motivated to pursue a career in manufacturing.

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