

“What’s So Cool About Manufacturing? Everything!”

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(Manufacturing Innovation Blog 3/4/16) As said by one of the students interviewed on her participation in the 3rd annual What’s So Cool About Manufacturing Student Video Contest in the Lehigh Valley (PA). I had the privilege to attend the awards ceremony of this awesome event ‘dreamed up’ by the Manufacturers Resource Center (MRC), the MEP affiliate in the Lehigh Valley region of Pennsylvania, held on February 23, 2016 with 800 people in attendance.



Jack Pfunder, President of MRC, and his team started this contest 3 years ago as an opportunity to expose middle school students to the wonders of manufacturing in their own back yard. As the Dream It, Do It lead for the state of Pennsylvania, MRC was wrestling with the talent pipeline issues faced by many manufacturers across the country. How do we excite the next generation of talented students to consider careers in this industry?

The Lehigh Valley has a wonderful network of Career and Technical High Schools with solid programs available for manufacturing careers, but they need to excite 7th and 8th graders to enroll. And of course parents need to get the message also that there are many companies in their community looking for talented and smart ‘kids’ to take on the challenge of helping them grow their businesses. With a few dollars from local philanthropy, and a few companies willing to open their doors to teams of 7th and 8th graders and their video cameras, the first 10 teams of students, with teacher coaches, piloted this innovative program. Student teams learn about the company, its manufacturing process, and the jobs required and then they plan and

“shoot” their footage to compete for the title of Coolest Video. Who votes? The community. With ads, billboards, and social media, the community is guided to a website hosting the videos, where they can vote for their favorite.

This year, there were 30 student teams matched with 30 manufacturing companies. Over 117,000 people throughout the Lehigh Valley viewed the videos and voted! The diverse teams of 4-8 students learned about local manufacturers with diverse products such as Peeps, guitars, electronic controls, polymer processing, pharmaceuticals, cranberry juice and trucks.



As I wandered through the awards celebration event that had displays from the sponsoring companies, I heard so many kudos to the team at MRC and how much they enjoyed participating. Participating company representatives shared with me their challenges in attracting high quality applicants for their workforce. Many are smaller organizations that are not well known, even in their own communities. They told me how much they enjoyed showcasing their companies and their enthusiasm for manufacturing with the students. Some are already seeing an improvement in their recruiting outcomes!

Talking with students and parents, many shared comments that before these past few years of the contest, they didn't know many of these companies existed, and thought manufacturing was not a large component of the region. They know better now! And are glad they could participate.

Check out the videos at www.DreamitdoitPA.com to see just how cool manufacturing really is!