

# Collaboration will increase awareness and develop talent for manufacturing industry

Manatee and Sarasota counties are becoming the hot addresses for manufacturing.

Most people see our area as the hot spot for hospitality and tourism, and while that rings true, manufacturing is right up on its heels. The EDCs and community partners work incredibly hard to bring new companies here, and I also believe it's our hospitable spirit that helps attract these manufacturers. We are becoming known as a community that rallies together by sharing resources. One of the things I consistently hear when learning about businesses that are moving to or expanding in our area is that they are impressed with the collaboration they see and want to be a part of it.

Our hospitable spirit won't fill the talent gaps, though, and while our easy and friendly nature makes businesses want to call this area home, manufacturing demands highly-skilled workers, and there is a challenge to fulfill that need. Why the challenge? Part of the problem is that there is a perception that manufacturing jobs are dirty and grueling, and the only young people being encouraged to go into manufacturing are the ones who have family or friends in the industry.

Manufacturing is not the industry that it used to be. In fact, the jobs in this area are interesting and rewarding and can make for a lifelong, fulfilling career. I've toured many of the local plants and am amazed at the precision and skill that employees need to be able to create these products. JRL Ventures in Bradenton is manufacturing an interesting array of products, everything from theme park rides to aerospace and military products. Air Products moved into Palmetto last year, projecting to create more than 250 jobs within four years at its plant, which produces liquefied natural gas heat exchangers. Teakdecking Systems manufactures custom teak decks and interior floors for yachts and ships, and Pierce is manufacturing fire trucks. These highly skilled workers are our neighbors, our friends, and our family who are helping to create these products, and it's being done right here in our own backyard.

Jobs in manufacturing are growing rapidly in our area and have a huge impact on our economy. Not only does every \$1 spent in manufacturing add \$1.37 to the U.S. economy, but for every 100 jobs in manufacturing, 250 additional jobs are created in other sectors. The jobs are here, and are going to be here in the future, so that's why it's important for workforce partners, EDCs, community partners and educational institutions to continue to come together to make manufacturing a priority.

We already have a head start. CareerSource Suncoast hosts a weekly partner meeting where we bring together community leaders to talk about the business environment, including manufacturing. We are also

CareerEdge's community-wide action plan to increase awareness for community organizations, and our Journey to Success youth program experience. Business partners in the Sarasota-Manatee Manufacturers Manufacturing Day, and in all more than 600 students will have the

opportunity of an up-close and personal view inside high-tech manufacturing. A handful of employers will also participate in a manufacturing job fair at Suncoast Technical College from 2-5 p.m. Oct. 7. Their goal is to not only fill job openings they currently have, but to talk with younger generations and encourage them to pursue jobs in manufacturing. These employers know that a pretty big talent gap is awaiting us in the near future, and they also know how important it is to keep the momentum going to create more opportunities and develop talent. We will charge on and stand together to increase awareness and change perceptions to show that manufacturing is a viable career option.

Ted Ehrlichman, president and CEO of CareerSource Suncoast, writes about workforce issues across the region.



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