

In a Year of Change, FLATE and FloridaMakes Inspires Tomorrow's Manufacturing Workforce

2020 will forever be remembered as a year of profound challenges for America, and the entire world. The manufacturing community adapted, pivoted, and responded to the Covid-19 pandemic. During this challenging time, the Florida Advanced Technological Education Center (FLATE) remained steadfast to inspire the next generation's pursuit of manufacturing careers.

"Florida's manufacturing sector is at the heart of our state's dynamic and robust economy," said Henry Mack, Chancellor of Florida's Department of Education's (DOE) Division of Career and Adult Education. "Florida's educational institutions are also integrated into the sector. From STEM programs in our elementary schools to our colleges and technical colleges, Florida's learning resources are the catalyst to careers in manufacturing."

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis elevated the importance of manufacturing by issuing a proclamation declaring October as "Florida Manufacturing Month."

With Covid-19 restrictions to consider, a statewide coordinated effort amongst all the stakeholders was launched to celebrate manufacturing in October. Florida is home to over 20,000 manufacturing companies and accounts for nearly 5% of the state's GSP. The sector provides over 380,000 high-wage jobs with an average wage of \$61,753. Preparing Floridians for manufacturing jobs is at the core of Manufacturing Month.

Nationally, both Manufacturing Day and Manufacturing Month events are coordinated by the Manufacturing Institute of the National Manufacturers Association (NAM). Florida is one of the most active states to host celebrations and have plans to grow and expand awareness activities in the future.

FLATE, as part of the FloridaMakes Network, partnered with manufacturers across the state, regional manufacturers associations (RMAs), Florida's DOE and local school districts to collaborate and re-

tool their original plans resulting in a vibrant and easily accessible virtual format.

“We know there’s a projected 4.6. Million U.S. manufacturing jobs in the coming years,” says Marilyn Barger, director of FLATE. “We’re keeping our eye on the future and engaging Florida’s manufacturers of tomorrow. The positive feedback from Manufacturing Month activities that we received from young participants has been encouraging. Florida is indeed doing the work necessary to make sure Floridians will be prepared to fill those high wage jobs.”

The HUB: Results Support MFG Month’s Success

One of the biggest hurdles to filling those jobs is awareness. Florida remedied this problem through the launch of the “Florida Manufacturing Month Hub.” The Hub, hosted by the FloridaMakes Network for all statewide Manufacturing Month events, included a wide array of virtual activities to help manufacturers, educators, students and the community at-large stay engaged and up to date on all Manufacturing Month events across the state. These activities pave the way toward careers in the sector.

Events on the Hub included:

- Virtual Plant Tours, hosted by manufacturers
- Manufacturing Roundtables hosted by RMAs
- Education Webinars, hosted by Florida Advanced Technological Education Center (FLATE)
- Regional and Statewide Manufacturing Awards Ceremonies

Coordinated amongst businesses, agencies, and nonprofits, students were able to learn more about how to step into the manufacturing sector. Some highlights from Manufacturing Month activities include:

1. 25 virtual plant tours are hosted on Florida’s MFG Month Hub
2. Over 2,500 people registered for the Hub-hosted events including 1,390 students

3. 95% of students stated the HUB “gave me new information about careers in advanced manufacturing.”
4. 93% of students agreed they learned something new about the sector
5. 85% would recommend participation in Florida Manufacturing Month events
6. Student interest in a manufacturing career increased 45% post tour (Interest from girls increased by 50%, and from boys 44%).

Quotes from student participants include

“I now know the real meaning of manufacturing and how it affects us in our daily lives.”

“After today, I’m more interested in a manufacturing career.”

“You can make a lot of money and earn six figure salary if you’re good at it.”

MFG: A Bright Future

Given that Florida’s Manufacturing Month and Day events were successful in the midst of a global pandemic, it’s fair to say that 2021 will engage even more students. Plans are already underway for October 2021 and will build on the Hub’s success with in-person tours, additional webinars, and innovative student and community engagement activities.

As we look to 2021 and beyond, Florida’s Manufacturing Month and Manufacturing Day will continue to expand to engage more schools, more companies and more students. Despite the restrictions and a lot of uncertainty, both the manufacturing sector and the education community worked hard to ensure that Florida’s students remain connected to the sector. Florida’s manufacturing future is bright and FLATE is committed to creating the educational pathways, multiple

access points and opportunities that open the doors to high paying careers for Floridians.