

Midlands Manufacturing: Start Here! *Event Works to Prepare Students, Boost Workforce*

On April 10, 2013, Midlands manufacturers and educators joined forces for Midlands Manufacturing...Start Here!, a one-day event to generate awareness of increasing manufacturing workforce needs and career opportunities. Hosted by Midlands Education and Business Alliance (MEBA), Midlands Regional Education Center and Midlands Technical College, the event will have continued and growing impact.

"Manufacturing is big business, yet a majority of manufacturers report they are facing a moderate to severe workforce shortage," says Dr. Kaye Shaw, executive director of MEBA and coordinator of the Midlands REC. "In South Carolina alone, more than 230 manufacturers have committed to investing \$8.4 billion and creating more than 24,000 jobs in South Carolina. We must work to inform and prepare students, ensuring our state has an available and qualified workforce."

Nearly 40 educators organized into teams visited one of nine local manufacturing facilities. Participating educators were given an up-close look inside the world of manufacturing, learning about career paths, workforce demands, needed skills and certifications. Industry leaders talked with educators about the skills employees need and offered education and training recommendations for interested students.

Following the site visit, educators selected interested students for a return visit, allowing the students and their parents a firsthand look at the industry and the opportunity to talk one-on-one with industry leaders about their jobs, education requirements and career paths.

Malyia East and Tyjon Adgeron, both Richland Two students enrolled in the Advanced Manufacturing career cluster, were invited to visit Pontiac Foods. "Since the visit, both students have grown even more excited about a future career in manufacturing," says Samantha Turner, MEBA's workforce development coordinator. "Parents, too, were excited to learn about the many opportunities the industry can offer for their children."

Participating sites included Apex Tools, Lang Mekra North America, Mekra Tool and Mold, Michelin, Pontiac Foods, PurePower R & D, PurePower Technologies, Square D by Schneider Electric and The Ritedose Corporation.

"We hope this event will help expose more students to the world of manufacturing, industry needs and careers," explains Shaw. "We are pleased with the response thus far and look forward to building on the success."

The event was made possible by a grant from the SC Chamber of Commerce, the South Carolina Association of School Administrators (SCASA) and Bank of America.



James Howard, component manufacturing supervisor at PurePower Technologies, talks with Schiria Wilson, guidance professional at Westwood High School, about industry skills and workforce needs.