



» Waukesha Metal Products, Sussex, Wis., invites not only young people to tour its facilities on Manufacturing Day, it invites the general public. Photo courtesy of Waukesha Metal Products.

Manufacturing Day, now under the care of the National Association of Manufacturers in association with the Manufacturing Institute and the National Institute of Standards and Technology's Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership, is set for Oct. 4 this year. To make the most of the event, it makes sense to start planning now.

Visit the Website

One of the first things your company can do is register with the national Manufacturing Day website: www.mfgday.com/user/register. This will place your event with all the other organizations hosting events in early October.

Even if Manufacturing Day is the only community outreach that you undertake, it can generate interest, especially in a community where manufacturing has a strong legacy.

"Really once we registered our company as a host on the national Manufacturing Day website, interested local high schools and community colleges were reaching out to us," said Doug Kosch, sales manager, Rockford Toolcraft Inc., in Rockford, Ill.

The national website has other helpful material as well. You will find tips for planning the event, organizing the facility tour, preparing displays for the visit, and planning follow-up. There's even a "smart manufacturing" comic book and an accompanying app that showcases how augmented reality, Industry 4.0, and additive manufacturing are transforming modern manufacturing by tracking how a drone is manufactured.

Online guidance is helpful, but sometimes the best advice comes from peers. Here's what some veterans of Manufacturing Day have to say about getting the most out of the event.

Plan for MFG Day Now

Those interviewed for this story indicated that they usually begin planning in the summer for the early October event. It takes time to plan what will be done at the facility, who will be invited, who will assist with logistics on the open house day, and how to conduct the necessary follow-ups to ensure everything stays on schedule.

Superior Joining Technologies Inc., Machesney Park, Ill., has been hosting Manufacturing Day events from the very start. Over the years, management has dedicated from one to as many as three employees to assist with the planning.

"You really need to start about three months before," said Teresa Beach-Shelow, Superior Joining's owner and president. "That allows you to coordinate with others. Do I want to partner with the people in my industrial park? Do I want to partner with the people in my manufacturing

MFG DAY

MAKE THE MOST
OF YOUR
**Manufacturing
Day**
EVENT

These tips can help put your company
in the best light when the community
comes to learn more about manufacturing

By Dan Davis

If you can't find them, you have to grow them.

Fabricators have been fighting that battle for a couple of decades now. As they have tried to add key personnel to their manufacturing businesses to take advantage of new opportunities, they have been greeted with an uninterested public. People simply don't realize the opportunities that a career with a modern manufacturer might hold.

The interest in finding skilled workers has been a consistent theme among fabricators that respond to *The FABRICATOR's* "What Keeps You up at Night?" survey, which is done every other

year. It has been the No. 1 concern by a wide margin since 2013.

The Fabricators & Manufacturers Association realized the uphill battle that metal fabricators faced in trying to boost manufacturing's image after years of neglect. That's why the association launched Manufacturing DaySM in 2011. It wanted to set aside a day for manufacturers to open their doors to the community to let them see for themselves that the dark and dingy workplaces of old have been replaced with well-lit and clean environments where workers are operating cutting-edge machinery to deliver quality parts in minutes that would have once taken hours to fabricate.

community? Do I only want to invite the local school that might be only a couple of miles away?"

Superior Joining has the benefit of being in a region with a rich manufacturing legacy, Rockford, Ill., and the Illinois-Wisconsin stateline area. As a result, it works with local chambers of commerce, school districts, the American Welding Society, and the Career Education Associates of North Central Illinois (CEANCI), which supports more than 100 career and technical education instructors in the 13 high schools in the consortium. Coordinating with all of these parties can take some time.

Waukesha Metal Products, Sussex, Wis., has been involved for at least seven years, according to Sarah Paque, the company's marketing and executive coordinator. Planning really picks up in August, but in many ways, Paque said it's a yearlong effort.

"You're continually reaching out to high schools and offering to help. You want to keep those lines of communication open," she said.

The close connections with the educators have paid off in a highly visible way. Paque said that after finding out last year that the local school district was closed on Manufacturing Day, the first Thursday in October date now appears on the official school district calendar. Educators now know not to plan anything for this particular day.

Figure out the Guest List

If you are looking to interest the next generation into considering possible careers in manufacturing, it makes sense that they might be the target audience for most of your efforts. That's why making connections with local teachers, guidance counselors, principals, and school district administrators makes a lot of sense.

But those aren't the only sources to contact if you are looking to reach out to young people. Waukesha Metal Products has had success with those who don't attend local educational institutions.



» After a panel discussion at a Rockford, Ill.-area banquet facility, Rockford, Ill.-area students had the chance to walk and chat with local manufacturers that they didn't get to meet with as part of their Manufacturing Day tours. Superior Joining Technologies Inc., Machesney Park, Ill., was one of the companies with a tabletop exhibit at last year's event. Photo courtesy of Superior Joining Technologies Inc.

"The other thing that we've had success with is reaching out to home-schooled kids. It kind of snowballs from there," Paque said.

Although their children don't attend one brick-and-mortar location, parents of home-schooled kids tend to coordinate with each other. Making contact with one parent can lead to connections with other home-schooled students, as most of these families are looking to accentuate the lessons with field trips and hands-on learning opportunities.

Bethany Mead, CEANCI's community outreach coordinator, said that, although her organization's focus is primarily on public schools in the area, her fellow planners have discussed reaching out to private schools and nontraditional groups, such as the Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois, which promotes its own science, technical, and engineering programs. These efforts result in a new audience for manufacturers that they might not have had a chance to reach in the past.

"The more, the merrier," Mead said. "The



» After visiting local manufacturing facilities, students from Rockford, Ill.-area schools had the chance to attend an afternoon gathering where they got to hear from local manufacturing representatives. Photo courtesy of Superior Joining Technologies Inc.

more exposure we can give the students, the more they learn. They then can decide if they want to delve into these opportunities."

Of course, a Manufacturing Day event doesn't have to be just for students. Superior Joining has invited and hosted employees' families for the day as well. Others have invited local politicians, dignitaries, and business associates. It's a day to not only celebrate manufacturing, but perhaps also your own company.

For those that are serious about boosting manufacturing's image, and maybe that of their own companies, they can invite the local media. Whatever is planned to grab the attention of guests likely will pique the interest of the television news viewer or newspaper reader.

Prepare a Schedule

In all honesty, seeing modern manufacturing likely will stay with visitors after they have witnessed it in action. That's probably the No. 1 activity during any open house event: Show them how things are made.

"For many young people, this will be their first time in a manufacturing facility with little or no understanding of how metal stampings are produced," said Rockford Toolcraft's Kosch. "By the end of the tour, they have a much better understanding, and they think that's pretty cool."



» Students gather around an assembly as they learn more about what Waukesha Metal Products makes for its customers. Photo courtesy of Waukesha Metal Products.

MANAGEMENT » CHIEF CONCERNS

In particular, Kosch mentioned that the company's 4,400-ton stamping press, nicknamed "Brutus," really captures visitors' attention. It's larger than a two-story house.

Beach-Shelow has showcased her company's laser welding equipment in the past, and because Superior Joining is now involved in commercial 3D printing, she said she expects that to be a major part of this year's Manufacturing Day event. Additionally, she has coordinated with Lincoln Electric to have one of its trucks, which contains its latest welding equipment, appear at the shop on that day for more firsthand technology encounters.

Along with a tour, Waukesha Metal Products has arranged for its younger guests to participate in a game. They are asked to put together an assembly, and teams compete against each other to see which team can do it fastest. Paque said that the exercise not only generates some excitement for the students, but also paints a clearer picture as to what exactly the metal fabricator does for its customers.

Most companies do take time out to make a presentation to the students. In addition to general company overviews, speakers can focus on themes that might appeal to the visitors. Superior Joining spends time talking about the different job functions required to make the manufacturer a success. Rockford Toolcraft discusses apprenticeship opportunities, where students can work full-time, get on-the-job training, and still attend school once per week.

CEANCI, working in conjunction with the Rockford Chamber of Commerce, coordinated visits to local manufacturers for almost 400 students last Manufacturing Day. Mead said CEANCI has found added success in promoting the

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— Teresa Beach-Shelow,
Superior Joining Technologies Inc.

visits by having representatives from the manufacturing companies speak to students a week before the tour. This gives the speaker a chance to talk about what the students might be seeing on the tour, information about the company, the different types of jobs available in manufacturing, education required for those jobs, the pay scales of certain jobs, and how to dress and act during the visit. Students also are able to hear what the speaker is saying, Mead said, which is not always possible in a manufacturing setting, where equipment is operating and lift trucks are moving raw material and parts around.

Keep the Goal in Mind

While an open house effort like this is part of a nationwide event, manufacturers should realize that participation in Manufacturing Day is likely to help them as much as spreading the gospel about the positives associated with modern manufacturing. After all, these companies are part of local communities that, frankly, often don't realize what manufacturers offer.

"Someone who tours your shop may be your next employee, supplier, or even your next customer, so think of it as an event that can positively boost your business with little to no money being spent out of pocket," said Ryan Forsell, a Superior Joining sales representative.

Manufacturing Day events have helped to elevate Waukesha Metal Products' profile with local residents. The company is now being recognized as an "employer of choice," as opposed to a business that people used to discover accidentally, Paque said.

Waukesha Metal Products actually has two high school students, who first visited the company on Manufacturing Day tours, working part-time there this summer. The effort to share modern manufacturing with the younger generation is paying off. **FAB**

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Career Education Associates of North Central Illinois, www.ceanci.org

Manufacturing Day, www.mfgday.com

Rockford Toolcraft Inc., www.rockfordtoolcraft.com

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