



# RETOOLING

## for the NEW Workforce

Manufacturing is critically important to Northeast Wisconsin. According to the NEW Manufacturing Alliance, a manufacturer-led organization working to promote manufacturing in the Northeast Wisconsin Region, 23% of people employed are working in the manufacturing sector within our Region, compared to a state average of 16%. (The U.S. national statistic is 9% of the workforce.)

"On average, the manufacturing sector has the highest wages per any other private sector industry," shared Ann Franz, Director of the NEW Manufacturing Alliance. "The economic impact from manufacturing is significant. For every one dollar spent in manufacturing, another \$1.81 is added back to the economy."

Wisconsin has a longstanding manufacturing history of making things including paper, plastics, machine builders, food and shipbuilding. Since manufacturing has been fundamental to the strength of the overall economy, it is critical to build and support a future workforce to keep the industry strong and provide viable opportunities for job seekers. October has been proclaimed as Manufacturing Month by the Governor due to the industry's impact in our state.





The aging workforce is an issue not only for manufacturers but across all industry sectors. Baby Boomers are starting to retire in more significant numbers than ever before. The Shift Commission on Work, Workers and Technology reported that by 2024, nearly one-quarter of the workforce is projected to be 55 or older, which is more than double the share than in 1994.<sup>1</sup>

The NEW Manufacturing Alliance surveyed its members in Spring 2017 to understand the impact of the aging workforce throughout the Region. Franz shared that their Retired Worker Survey reported that 85% of companies surveyed are concerned with the aging workforce, but only 35% have any type of strategy to address the issue.

To tackle the issue of losing Baby Boomers, and their industry knowledge due to retirement, many organizations have implemented key best practices to address knowledge loss and fill vacant positions. These best practices include: part-time or flexible schedule for older employers to stay on the job; cross-training; documentation and development of standard operating procedures; internships, co-ops and youth apprenticeships; registered apprenticeships and succession planning.

The Retired Worker Survey by the Alliance provided findings that have been, and will be, used to connect and communicate with K-12 and higher education audiences about the demand in key occupations due to the large number of retirees in Northeast Wisconsin. Demonstrated by the average tenure of more than nine years, the careers in manufacturing in Northeast Wisconsin are indeed rewarding. To meet the workforce demands, it is critical that the public understand the variety of high-wage and high-demand occupations that are available.

In order to address the skills shortage, multiple strategies must be developed to make an impact on the industry in the Region. The NEW Manufacturing Alliance has created several taskforces focused on many issues and challenges.

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*Specific initiatives have been created from the Alliance to address the challenges identified within the manufacturing sector in our area.*

**Get Real Math!** videos were created to address the issue that math teachers frequently face when students ask when they'll utilize various math skills in the real world. The goal is to create a video focused on every fifth through ninth grade math skill in order for students to learn more about the correlation to manufacturing careers. Currently, there are 23 videos produced relating to specific topics. 12 new videos are being debuted at the Get Real Math Video Premier in October.

**Internship Draft Day**, held in November at Lambeau Field, is a college job fair with a twist. Students from area technical colleges are invited to attend and, unlike other college career fairs, attendees have the opportunity to participate in 15-minute interviews for paid internships while at the event.

**All-Star Program**, is an initiative of the Alliance that features ten select manufacturing employees, between the ages of 18 - 36, from area manufacturers who encourage students to consider manufacturing careers in a comprehensive magazine and online videos.

The Alliance values collaboration with other organizations, including the Fox Cities Chamber, in order to increase awareness of manufacturing careers for the future generation. Review upcoming events and programs at [www.newmfgalliance.org](http://www.newmfgalliance.org) to learn more about the initiatives being implemented to support the vital sector of manufacturing in Northeast Wisconsin.





*The 2017 Retired Worker Survey from the NEW Manufacturing Alliance found the following occupations having more than 30% of their workforce being 56 or older:*

**37% Maintenance Mechanic/Millwrights**

**35% Electricians    33% Service Technicians**

**33% Electro-Mechs    33% Machinists**

**38% Research & Development Engineers**

**34% Sales Reps    32% Electrical Engineers**

**32% Mechanical Engineer Techs**

**31% Electrical Engineer Techs**

Specifically related to the issue of the retiring workforce, a taskforce on finding best practices and strategies to address the issue has been created and a Retired Worker Symposium is being planned for Spring 2018 in the Fox Cities. It is important for manufacturers to speak in a unified voice to communicate to the public about the rewarding and lucrative careers available in manufacturing.

Northeast Wisconsin two-year and four-year colleges are addressing the issue by providing new engineering and engineering technology degree programs. Over the last 11 years, by working together with the task forces, the Alliance has seen a significant increase in enrollment in Machining and Welding types of programs in area technical colleges. For example, in 2005 there were 193 students enrolled in Welding programs and by 2015, that number increased to 835 and continues to increase.

Franz shared that another focus of the Alliance is measuring the improved perception of manufacturing in the Region by surveying parents of students who will become the future workforce. Last Fall, almost 900 people completed the Alliance's survey on perceptions of manufacturing careers. Based on a similar national SME survey, a key finding showed that 72% of local parents agreed to the statement that manufacturing is an 'exciting and engaging profession,' whereas only 50% agreed in the national survey.

Manufacturing is vital in our communities and parents are seeing it as a viable career path for the future generation. Franz shared that the Alliance will administer the survey every two years to determine if the perceptions of parents have improved.

There is still work to do to improve the overall perception of the manufacturing sector. However, through initiatives of the NEW Manufacturing Alliance and their partners, the future generation is being exposed to the viable career opportunities in the industry of manufacturing while strategies and best practices are being implemented to harness the knowledge of the retiring generation.

### **Who is the NEW Manufacturing Alliance?**

*The NEW Manufacturing Alliance is a manufacturer-led organization that began in 2006 with 12 members. Today, the Alliance has over 200 members, mostly made up of manufacturers, across 18 counties in Northeast Wisconsin. By working closely with other organizations, including the Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce, they work to promote manufacturing across the Northeast Wisconsin Region. Their vision is that every Northeast Wisconsin manufacturer will find the talent it needs.*

*In June 2017, the Alliance was recognized by Frost & Sullivan's Manufacturing Leadership Council with the Talent Management Leadership Award alongside major manufacturers such as Dow Chemical and Oracle. The award provides validation to the impact of the work being done to enhance the manufacturing sector in our Region.*

#### **Citation:**

*1 - Eisenberg, Richard. The Future of Work for People 50+ Will Surprise You. Forbes, 22 May 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nextavenue/2017/05/22/the-future-of-work-for-people-50-will-surprise-you/#1e8112a372e7>.*