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## Manufacturers brainstorm ways to spur job interest

By: SCOTT WHIPPLE, Herald staff

**NEW BRITAIN - Thirty area manufacturers met Tuesday at Okay Industries to tackle a growing problem in their industry: How to find skilled workers to replace retiring baby boomers. Owners and executives of city businesses brainstormed possible solutions to employment problems that threaten to cripple the city's economy in the next decade.**

Manufacturers agreed that the shrinking labor pool can be explained by certain misconceptions:

n Most people still tend to view the factory floor as dirty, noisy and unsafe;  
n that jobs are repetitive, boring and low paid,  
n and that manufacturing in Connecticut is moribund.

City Business Development Coordinator Bill Carroll, who came up with the idea for the summit, stressed the importance of getting younger people into manufacturing.

Tom Phillips, CEO of Capital Workforce Partners, a Hartford-based nonprofit, said in recent years the emphasis changed from people looking for jobs to jobs looking for people. Faced with an aging state workforce, his organization is working with Connecticut Business & Industry Association to develop strategies that encourage younger workers to get on-the-job training and associate degrees.

"We're helping smooth the transition from school to the work environment," Phillips said.

Anita Cardella of the Hartford Job Corps Academy said students get hands-on training, can earn a high school diploma or GED, do job shadowing and participate in work-based learning situations.

"Young people need to see computers and where they'll be working to believe the work environment has changed for the better," Cardella said.

Judi Spreda, customer service manager of Peter Paul Electronics, said manufacturers need to make a commitment to students.

"We can't just sit back and wait," she said. "We all have to do our part."

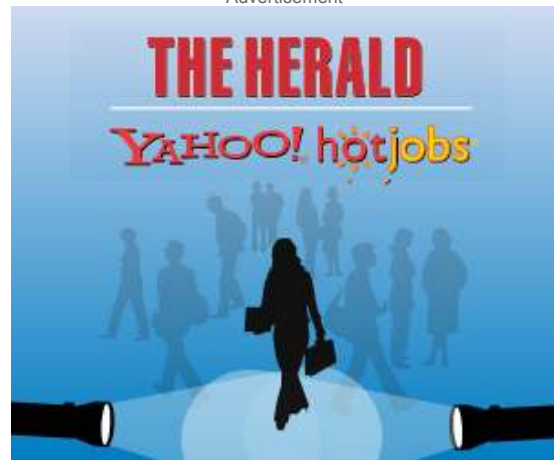
Several participants agreed on the need for "customized recruitment," to "home in on specific workplace skills," and to involve high school and college guidance counselors by inviting them to tour various plants.

David Bovenizer, CEO and founder of Lionheart Ventures, said the word needs to get out that manufacturing is not dead in Connecticut. The United States still holds 45 percent of the global market and maintains an edge in high technology products. Bovenizer said a good way to interest prospective manufacturing workers is to point out that your firm has "cool equipment," and that you "build jet engines," rather than simply supply parts for them.

"We clearly need to do something about the [high school] drop-out rate," said Bill Millerick, president of the New Britain Chamber of Commerce. "Future workforce development is critical to the life of New Britain."

Millerick said he and a team of manufacturers plan to meet with Doris Kurtz, superintendent of city schools, to discuss ways the curriculum can prepare students for the workforce.

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