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JOURNAL OF THE MINNESOTA PRECISION MANUFACTURING ASSOCIATION



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Celebrating Voices, Meaningful Change



MYRIKA SCHNEIDER
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Dear MPMA Members,

As we continue to build and strengthen Minnesota's manufacturing workforce, it is crucial that we take the time to celebrate all voices that make our industry vibrant and innovative. Every individual in our sector brings unique skills, perspectives, and experiences that contribute to our collective success. By highlighting and honoring these voices, we not only recognize their invaluable contributions, but also inspire future generations to join and enrich our industry. This celebration of voices is at the heart of my passion for workforce development, and the amazing opportunity that lies before us.

My dedication to workforce development stems from a deep belief in the power of education and training to transform lives and communities. Having spent years working in this field, I understand the critical importance of equipping individuals with the skills needed to excel in today's everchanging economic environment. Where every person's potential can be unlocked through education, training and opportunity.

As we embark on our Drive for Five efforts, MPMA will be working closely with several Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) who will play a pivotal role by connecting our initiatives with those who need them most. Their grassroots efforts and deep understanding of local communities ensure that our efforts will reach individuals from diverse backgrounds and help them to realize their potential in the manufacturing field. By partnering with CBOs, we can amplify diverse voices and learn to foster more inclusive work cultures that reflect the richness of our state's diversity to build a stronger and more resilient workforce.

Success in our mission depends on mutual understanding and collaboration among all stakeholders—MPMA members, industry leaders, educational institutions, employers and community organizations. By working together, we can align our goals, share our resources, and create a comprehensive approach to creating a pipeline of skilled workers to meet the evolving needs of our industry. I am committed to ensuring that our efforts are coordinated, our communication is open, and our impact is substantial. Together, we can drive meaningful progress toward a brighter future for manufacturing in Minnesota.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to this important work. I look forward to working closely with you all to achieve our shared vision for Minnesota's manufacturing workforce.

Sincerely,

Myrika Schneider

Myrika Schneider 

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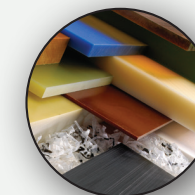
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The Diversity in Manufacturing Initiative (DiMi): A Pathway to Inclusion in Manufacturing



ADESEWA ADESIJI
Workforce Strategy
Consultant

Minnesota Department of
Employment and Economic
Development
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Launched in 2022, the Diversity in Manufacturing Initiative (DiMi) was created in response to a need within Minnesota's manufacturing sector: the quest for a more diverse and inclusive workforce. As the industry grows, the demographic landscape of the workforce is shifting, becoming increasingly racially and ethnically diverse. DiMi aims to bridge the gap between manufacturing companies and underrepresented communities by addressing these challenges head-on.

DiMi operates as a coalition, comprising of employers, industry associations, stakeholders, and the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). This partnership increases the initiative's influence and ability to promote the need for change throughout various manufacturing sectors. A primary goal of DiMi is to foster strong relationships with marginalized communities and help change the perception of manufacturing as an uninviting industry.

DiMi has established avenues for participation among manufacturing companies through its committees. These committees not only help facilitate collaboration but also allow members to share best practices and develop strategies that support diversity initiatives. Members can choose from one of four committees:

1. Community Engagement
2. Education & Training
3. Recruiting & Onboarding
4. Retention & Career Advancement

One of DiMi's goals is to gather data and identify successful practices through research. These insights will be made available on its resources webpage, hosted on the CareerForceMN.com platform, and serving as a resource tool for manufacturers seeking to enhance their diversity and inclusion efforts. Although initially concentrated in the metro area, DiMi has expanded its outreach to include members in greater Minnesota, reflecting its commitment to inclusivity across the entire state.

In pursuit of its goals, DiMi collaborates with national organizations, such as the Women in Manufacturing (WiM) Association. These partnerships broaden the initiative's reach and impact, and the creation of a dedicated WiM webpage connected to DiMi signifies a major stride towards promoting its objectives beyond Minnesota.

The Diversity in Manufacturing Initiative is one of many avenues for exploring strategies to foster an inclusive manufacturing sector. Through collaboration, resource sharing, and active engagement with underrepresented populations, DiMi is setting a precedent for a more inclusive and sustainable future for Minnesota's manufacturers.

Growing DiMi

DiMi is growing and looking for industry employers and partners to join the initiative. For additional information about the Diversity in Manufacturing Initiative, or to express interest in becoming a partner or member, please reach out to DEED's Metro Area Workforce Strategy Consultant, Adesewa.Adesiji@state.mn.us. [PM](#)

MPMA wants to thank the DEED team for volunteering with us in the Minnesota Manufactured booth at the Minnesota State Fair!

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Hands-On Learning

Apprenticeship Programs Gain Popularity in Manufacturing World

By Jaimee Barnhart

As the manufacturing landscape continues to evolve and grow along with technological advancements, the demand for skilled labor has never been greater; as a result, traditional hiring methods are proving increasingly insufficient.

Some Minnesota-based employers, including Dynamic Group and Toro, have had to get creative over the past few years to meet workforce challenges. One time-tested approach that's making a comeback is the apprenticeship model, where employees gain further education while they're already on the job.

Increasing Connection

Brian Kalina, Director of Tooling Operations at Dynamic's Foley facility, located in Coon Rapids, says the apprenticeship program has improved the way their hiring process works overall by prioritizing hands-on experience over formal education alone — and providing pathways for young professionals to get more of both.

"Whereas we used to hire students who had just graduated a two-year program, now, we're focused on hiring students who are already engaged in school, perhaps connecting them with grants and career opportunities with us," Kalina said. "Our role has changed from just being managers, to being teachers and advisors as they navigate the beginnings of their careers."

Apprentices at Dynamic Group don't just learn how to do one aspect of manufacturing. Instead, they have the opportunity to move through all aspects of injection mold building, from CNC

milling, turning and grinding to wire and sinker EDM and more. Although most will end up specializing in one area eventually, Kalina said, they want them to come away from the program with not only the necessary skill set to do their future job well, but more importantly, a high level of respect for all areas of the manufacturing process.

"We want them to walk away saying, 'I understand what it means to work in that area, I know how to use that equipment and the potential pitfalls or mistakes that

mentorship to the next generation is one of the skills apprentices are scored on.

"That's how you really 'graduate' from the program — you get to a point where you've completed all of this training, and now you can train someone else on exactly how to do what you just learned how to do," Lasanen said. "In this way, we've created a pipeline of really strong candidates, not just for Dynamic Group, but for our industry as a whole. If they decide to move on to another opportunity, we also celebrate that, because we know we've continued to fuel the growth of the industry with really great tool makers."

Ben Mueller, an Edina native and current apprentice with Dynamic Group, has benefitted firsthand from the inter-generational mentorship that the program tries to foster. He cites Jeff Sabel, lead toolmaker at Dynamic Group, as one of his greatest resources during his time with the organization.

"Sometimes toolmakers have a hard time communicating with

apprentices because so much of what they know to do is so second nature they have a hard time explaining it with words," Mueller said. "Jeff doesn't have that difficulty. His willingness to sit down with me and work through things when I'm uncertain has had a really tremendous impact on how I view a good leader. I strive to offer the same patience and communication with newer apprentices who come to me with questions that he afforded me [the answers to]."

Mueller is also confident that Dynamic's program will get him to the next step in his career.



Grady Kruse, recent graduate of Toro's apprenticeship program

can happen, and I know how to be a better customer for those departments in the future," Kalina said. "We also want them to recognize that we're all in this together, mistakes happen, and we're going to identify problems and move forward together."

Elizabeth Lasanen, HR Manager at Dynamic Group, says one of the highlights of their apprenticeship program is the connection it builds between generations, and between manufacturers with different interests and backgrounds. In fact, providing

"Dynamic has always been good about presenting me with opportunities to fine tune my skills, and we have a clear timeline to the end of my apprenticeship now," said Mueller. "I'm very confident that this program will get me there."

Another Approach

Toro, a Bloomington-based outdoor environment solutions manufacturer, structures their apprenticeship program a little differently. Rather than finding students and training them on how to work at their organization, Toro's apprentices are already current employees, said Eric Taylor, Training Coordinator.

Employees who want to further their job-related education can interview and enter a bidding system to be selected as an apprentice. Once they're selected, they complete 8,000 hours of training, which typically takes a total of four years to complete.

Throughout that time, apprentices continue to work at Toro, but they also add new skills to their resumes, allowing a multitude of opportunities for advancement.

"We've had people start in a really entry level position with no formal educational requirements, and then work their way up to product development where they're working on prototypes and fabricating, welding, painting," Taylor said. "This program helps create a clearer path for people to get where they want to be."

Right now, there are five apprentices in Toro's program, with a total of 51 "Journey workers" who have completed it already. Employees start the apprenticeship at the base salary for the classification they work in, and if it's determined that they're on-track to meet education and hour requirements, they receive a raise in addition to the yearly raise all employees receive. Mark Ehmke is one stand-out Toro employee and current apprentice who Taylor says "just has that hunger to learn." Ehmke, in the first year of his program, has already gone above and beyond the credit requirements for his program, which Taylor says is already extensive.

"It seems like the program attracts really hard workers like that, who aren't satisfied with just coming in to work and doing a job," Taylor said. "They tend to be

really creative and like the more hands-on roles, and want to move up to those higher-skilled positions but just need the education to get there."

Ehmke, a LeCenter native who currently lives in Montgomery, Minnesota, worked as an electrician for many years before shifting gears and entering the manufacturing world.

After he started at Toro, he knew he wanted to continue advancing his career. The apprenticeship program has made opportunities for advancement seem achievable, Ehmke said, with every next step clearly laid out.

"The whole program is really well-structured, and I never question how many credits I need or what the next step will be," Ehmke said. "That makes the overall experience amazing, because you're not in limbo, and you always know what you have to do in order to achieve the next thing."

Ehmke has had such a good experience with Toro that he hopes to stay with the company for the remainder of his career.

"Being part of this program makes you want to achieve even more goals, and I think it's contagious to other members of the team when they see what we're working on," Ehmke said. "It makes people want to do even better at their daily job, which in turns makes us work better as a company."

Creating a Culture Shift

For Kalina, seeing the next generation of talent rise up and mentor the apprentices who come after them is one of the most rewarding aspects of having a program like the one Dynamic has.

"Seeing the level of pride that these apprentices have and are able to turn around and share that with those

who come after them gives a lot of hope to those of us who are further along in our careers for the future of this industry," Kalina said. "That's meant a lot as well, and it's created a culture shift where we're more excited to share what we know, to teach and learn from one another."

Starting an Apprenticeship Program

Both Kalina and Taylor say that offering an apprenticeship isn't overly complicated — but it does require a degree of intentionality for what your organization would like to gain from a similar program.

To start building your own program, visit apprenticeship.gov/employers/registered-apprenticeship-program/build/create or reach out to workforce@mpma.com for support from MPMA with Drive for Five resources. ^{PM}

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A Legacy of Customer Care

Nancy Lien Berndt carries a tradition of strong company culture at MME

By Jaimee Barnhart

Ever since Nancy Lien Berndt started sitting in on client meetings with her father, she remembers her dad telling everyone she was the future of the company.

"I have three sisters, and my dad was constantly thinking of succession, and of who would take over the company," Lien Berndt said. "He worked so hard, and he wanted us to be a part of what he had built, and of his success."

Now, Lien Berndt has been in her role as President of Brooklyn Park-based Modern Manufacturing & Engineering, Inc (MME) for almost a decade. But in many ways, her story with MME began even before she was born.

Lien Berndt's father, Hue Van Lien, moved to Minnesota from Vietnam in the 1980's. He was a machining school student when then-owner Chuck Larson hired him to work as a tool crib attendant, and was promoted to machinist shortly after graduation. As Lien worked his way

up to partner and eventually owner, he maintained the same commitment to his customers — and employees — that MME had become known for.

"I think he naturally thought of family first," Lien Berndt said. "He had four daughters, and even though the field is very male-dominated, he wanted us to be a part of it."

As early as middle school, Lien Berndt remembers helping out around the office anywhere she could, and she worked most summers between school learning all the aspects of how MME ran. Although she remembers initially being resistant to studying business, she took a few classes in college and fell in love with the field.

After graduating from the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management with a business degree, she started working for MME full-time. Her first role was in production, where she got to build relationships with everyone in the machining process from the customer to the employees on the floor.

"Don't be afraid to ask questions, or to seek out the right experts to help you. I regularly ask people to take things on, and it not only helps me, but it helps them to learn more and do more, too. I've learned that I don't have to do everything myself, so I'm always ready to ask for help, and I don't feel bad about it"

- Nancy Lien Berndt

Initially, Lien Berndt says, there was some pushback from longtime employees around her rising through the ranks of the company.

"I kind of started feeling like I had to prove myself, because people saw me as young and inexperienced," Lien Berndt said. "But at some point, I realized I didn't need to prove myself — I just showed people respect and didn't act like my title made me above them, and that mutual respect came naturally."

In 2015, Lien Berndt officially was promoted to President of the company by her father, who continues to lead alongside her as CEO. She still gets to work with two of her younger sisters, currently the company's HR Manager and Lead Controller. Together, Lien Berndt says, their biggest strength is their shared commitment to continuous learning and improvement.

"When I first joined management, we were a fairly small company, and we had kind of been doing things the same way for a while," Lien Berndt said. "When I would meet with customers I learned that it was good to ask questions, and that people were willing to share their resources and solutions if we just asked."

A Culture of Respect

While high performance, quality and on-time delivery all contribute to MME's success, the number-one driver of their growth over the past few decades has been placing a high priority on customer service, Lien Berndt said.

"We've just always treated the customer with the utmost care, and we try to make their jobs easier," said Lien Berndt. "Not only do we want to give them the best price, but we're always really respectful to them and what they do, and we do everything we can to help them out. That's kind of the number-one for us."

That respect extends beyond customer relationships, too. MME is known within the industry for both their high retention rates and their high employee satisfaction — and a lot of that can be attributed to the fact that they're family-run. Both Lien and Lien Berndt's leadership philosophies involve showing up to the office and seeing their employees in-person, and an

open-door policy when it comes to taking feedback from members of their team.

"We've had a lot of people who have worked here for 10, 20, 30 years, and they retire from here . . . we get to know their families and build really close relationships over time," Lien Berndt said. "My dad has always made it a priority to treat employees well. It didn't matter that he was the owner — everybody could talk to him, he knew everybody's name. I do the same thing — we just care a lot for our people."



That care is evident when any members of the team leave. Lien Berndt said it's been increasingly difficult to hire in recent years, especially as they seek to fill the roles of several long-time employees who retired or moved on to different opportunities.

Even through changing seasons, Lien Berndt remains intentional about seeing potential in new employees and creating room for them to grow.

"We have so many good stories of people that have joined the manufacturing industry and they had no idea what it was, and now they're managers and very high technical experts. I love being a part of that, and seeing how proud it makes them to step into that new piece of their career journey," Lien Berndt said.

Demetrio Guevara, who's been with Modern Manufacturing for over thirty years, is one of them. Originally from

Mexico, Guevara started working in manufacturing at the age of 15, repairing and replacing bicycle parts. Shortly after moving to Minnesota to join his wife in her home state, he started working at MME, and has been there ever since.

"There's opportunities for anyone [here], it doesn't matter your age, ethnicity, or background, they want to provide you with ways to learn and keep advancing," Guevara said.

Pong Thao has a long tenure with MME, too — almost two decades, first in

his role as a Painter, and now as part of the machining team. While he's been with the organization, he's navigated marriage, parenthood and the demands of raising a family while getting more education. Part of what's kept him at MME is the feeling that he's valued as part of a larger team.

"Even just looking around, you can see that they value diversity — we have all different races, ages, ethnicities . . . people who just graduated high school, all the way up to older generations," Thao said. "We also do a lot of stuff not only within our organization, but in the larger community, and that really brings a positive energy to our team."

Paving the Way for Others

In addition to a culture of caring and respect, it's important to Lien Berndt that she creates a culture of constant growth and improvement among her team.

One of the biggest things she’s done to grow as a leader, she says, is building relationships with other industry leaders, including those she’s met through MPMA.

“I’m not too worried about sharing information with other shops, and I’m not worried about the competition,” Lien Berndt said. “I just want to learn from others, so I’m always seeking people that can help give me ideas and help me think about the future.”

Lien Berndt thinks it’s important for her team to be involved in the community, too, and has facilitated that

by planning volunteer events outside the building like Feed My Starving Children and Toys for Tots, and inside the building by hosting tours for students to inspire and educate the next generation of manufacturers.

If Lien Berndt could give one piece of advice to someone just starting out in their manufacturing career, it would be to lean on others.

“Don’t be afraid to ask questions, or to seek out the right experts to help you,” Lien Berndt said. “I regularly ask people to take things on, and it not only helps me, but it helps them to learn more and

do more, too. I’ve learned that I don’t have to do everything myself, so I’m always ready to ask for help, and I don’t feel bad about it.”

Overall, the culture of passing on knowledge from one generation to the next is the lifeblood of MME.

“We know our employees are proud of their work, and I know that there’s just so much to be proud of, and then it just starts to speak for itself,” Lien Berndt said. “That’s a really big part of our success, that we have a lot of employees that want to be here.” **PM**

Behind the Machine: Demetrio Guevara



Originally from Mexico, Demetrio Guevara came to Minnesota with his wife to live in her home state.

“The winters are terrible,” he laughs.

Despite the cold, he’s been with his employer, Modern Manufacturing & Engineering (MME), for over three decades now. In his current role as Shop Supervisor, he enjoys that he gets to do a lot of problem-solving and troubleshooting.

“I’m the kind of person who will find the solution for any problem, because most problems have a solution,” Guevara said. “I like helping people. I like improving programs and making them more efficient.”

One thing Guevara appreciates about his work at MME is the opportunities it provides not only for those from all different cultural backgrounds, but for the next generation of manufacturers, too.

“We’re very involved in the community, at things like job fairs and schools, trying to get the younger

generation more interested in manufacturing,” Guevara said. “All it takes is planting one seed, and even if they don’t go into manufacturing, they might tell a friend about it.”

Through his own experiences meeting future manufacturers at various events with MME, Guevara has deepened his own passion for sharing the reality of the industry with students who might have written it off as a career before truly understanding the opportunities it could give them.

“Many kids think that a machine shop is this kind of dark, dirty place, and it’s nothing like that,” Guevara said. “In our workplace, and many like it, they’re high-tech, state-of-the-art machine shops.” **PM**

Special thanks to MME for sending volunteers to the Minnesota Manufactured booth at the State Fair, especially Demetrio who resolved challenges with the desktop mini mill.

In Loving Memory of Valerie Pham



Valerie Pham was a remarkable and skilled Quality Engineer who worked for Modern Manufacturing & Engineering, Inc. for 17 years. Though her first job at MME was in office administration, it didn’t take long for her to discover an interest in machining and quality control.

She enrolled at Hennepin Technical College, where she took machining classes and earned her certificate in Quality Assurance. Her love of learning then steered her to earn an Associate of Applied Science degree in Robotics from Dunwoody College of Technology.

Fluent in both English and Vietnamese, Valerie provided translation for our company communications, as well as for her coworkers in work and personal capacities. She was a dear friend to many of her colleagues and considered an integral part of MME and its success.

Val was just 40 years old when she recently passed away in an accident, leaving us with a sudden and deep feeling of loss. We will carry on Val’s legacy by continuing to foster a company culture that is centered around people, working together, and treating each other like family

Nancy Lien Berndt

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Fairgoers learn about manufacturing at the MN Manufactured Booth at the MN State Fair



Left: Photo by Emma Gottschalk | Right: Photo by Kevin Nguyen

How to Serve Uniquely Abled Students in Workforce Education

By Kristin Underwood | Director of Customized Workforce Education at South Central College

The time for our uniquely abled populations in the workforce is NOW! Industry partners are more ready than they have ever been to consider hiring uniquely abled populations. It's our time, as educators, to deliver students who are primed for these positions and help our industry partners support these uniquely abled employees once they are in the workforce.

Over the past two summers, South Central College (Minnesota) has partnered with The Uniquely Abled Project to offer the Uniquely Abled Academy (UAA), a CNC operator program for individuals with autism. We have learned so much. Here are some of our takeaways.

Find your "Karen."

In the world of The Uniquely Abled Project (UAP), a Karen is a great thing. Karen is the name of a woman who took

on the role of supporting uniquely abled individuals throughout the academy. When we first looked at hosting a Uniquely Abled Academy, that's exactly what the UAP consultant told us, "Find your Karen." What that translated to was finding someone who deeply cares about helping students, understands uniquely abled students and their needs in a classroom environment, is nimble enough to pivot at a moment's notice, and has a humbling confidence where they could bring up concerns and new strategies to tenured faculty.

Our "Karen" happened to be named Courtney Jones who came to us as a paraprofessional from the school district. As we were getting the program off the ground, there were days where we weren't sure if it would run. Courtney's approach was "just let me know if you need me for the job." This was a tell of how nimble she was and this served us extremely well

when piloting a new program. Courtney was our success coach throughout the duration of the Academy. Even if you don't have a success coach tied to class or program, how can you leverage positions and people who are passionate about helping uniquely abled students and position them in the classroom throughout the year?

Engage faculty who are truly lifelong learners.

We all like to think we are lifelong learners, especially when we dwell in higher education. But, recall the last technology upgrade at your campus as a better litmus test to see how much of a lifelong learner you truly are. And in this same vein, don't necessarily discount your veteran faculty—some of them truly are lifelong learners. We were lucky to happen upon machine tool technology (MTT)

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faculty Jon Morgan and Bill Block. In our first cohort, they worked to instruct our uniquely abled students. And while our interaction first occurred because we were using “their lab,” it quickly turned into a great partnership. Jon and Bill were open to learning how to serve uniquely abled students and they trusted Courtney to guide the way. Courtney didn’t know a thing about MTT and Jon and Bill didn’t know much about serving uniquely abled students, so they were learning together.

Having a summer focused on working with uniquely abled students with an expert success coach to help implement resources in the classroom to help students feel safe allowed for Jon and Bill to learn strategies that they could now implement in their semester-long, credit-based programs.

The question to reflect on here is, how are you helping faculty learn and implement strategies that will support uniquely abled students in the classroom?

Learn alongside industry partners.

I’ll admit, there will be missteps in this process and it’s not going to be an easy plug-and-play solution. But if

industry partners are primed to support uniquely abled employees, they are primed to serve all employees better. This is an opportunity to help elevate our workforce to be more inclusive and accessible.

Let’s use the knowledge we have from years of serving uniquely abled students and help employers put these same services and strategies in place. We have been doing this longer than our industry partners and we do have experience to share. What can you do today to help equip your industry partners when serving uniquely abled employees in the workforce?

Integrate, don’t just offer, wraparound services.

In the first year of the program, we offered our students the option of enrolling in services with local providers. It wasn’t monitored or enforced. Some students took advantage of this or were working with service providers already, but one example where we failed was we had a student looking to work with a local manufacturer in his home town. The student couldn’t get through some of the typical hiring barriers that some of us don’t even realize are barriers.


When I met with our state-wide service provider from the Department of Economic and Employment Development-Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DEED-VRS), they mentioned they had a connection at that manufacturer and if they were working alongside the student, they could have helped him through the process.

Since then, we have integrated wraparound services into the program. When a student is accepted into the Uniquely Abled Academy, they can either pay around \$2,500 or they can sign up for services with DEED-VRS and they get services and funding allocated for the program. With this model, we’ve seen students accessing more workforce opportunities. These services follow them into the workforce and help educate both the employee and the employer on how to build a sustainable workforce with traditionally marginalized populations.

A question to reflect on: In traditional credit-based programs, how are you tapping into community wraparound resources to help successfully carry the uniquely abled student from campus to the workforce? **PM**







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A Partnership that Hums in the Background but Makes all the Difference

How CorTrust Bank has helped MPMA lead the charge in serving our members and developing the workforce.

By Maddie Lemay | Lemay Story Studio

In 2024, the Minnesota Precision Manufacturing Association (MPMA) experienced significant change and growth. Earlier this year, we became independent of our association management company, Jaffe. We also received \$800,000 in grant funding from the state through a campaign called Drive for Five to promote the manufacturing industry to underrepresented groups. Through that funding, we hired another full-time staff member, increased our event and marketing spending, and are in pursuit of making “Minnesota Manufactured” a household catch-phrase across the state.

A strong partnership with CorTrust Bank, MPMA’s bank, has been crucial throughout all the good changes happening within and around MPMA this year.

Brenda Hawley, the events manager here at MPMA, said CorTrust Bank’s customer service was second-to-none in January when MPMA became independent of its management company.

“They came in person to our offices to make sure we were up and running,” Hawley said. “We had a few hiccups and they were right there to help us. Their hands-on support really displays the level of commitment CorTrust Bank brings to its relationships.”

Over the years, CorTrust Bank has been more than just a financial partner for MPMA; they’ve been

a pillar of support through every stage of our transformations. From ensuring a smooth transition from Jaffe to actively participating in sponsorship opportunities, CorTrust has demonstrated a deep commitment to the success of Minnesota’s manufacturing industry.

Growing Alongside Customers

CorTrust Bank is a fourth-generation, family-owned community bank that’s been around since 1930 and has 37 locations throughout Minnesota and South Dakota – 15 Minnesota locations and 22 South Dakota locations. They pride themselves on the relationships they maintain with every customer – because when you need to get ahold of your bank, you typically don’t have time to wait around.

“Our relationship with CorTrust Bank goes beyond transactions – it’s about trust and shared vision,” said Steve Kalina, President and Executive Director of MPMA. “Working with Jeff Wosje, Brian Whitmarsh, Brent Mitchell, and every CorTrust teller and support person has been an incredible experience. Their dedication to understanding our unique needs and responding to our questions right away has been really helpful.”

Brian Whitmarsh, a commercial lender who manages the bank’s Woodbury branch, first became involved with MPMA in 2018. He said that as

a community bank, they’re focused on smaller businesses, but because of CorTrust’s size, they also have the ability to grow with them.

“It’s rare that our clients would outgrow us,” Whitmarsh said.

Whitmarsh said he loves working with manufacturers because it’s extremely rewarding to support small businesses in their growth. One client, he said, was operating out of their house building machinery and cash-flowing on their own. They had a successful product, but they needed to move into a significantly larger building.

“Their projections made sense, so we were able to approve them to get into that building and watch them fill it up, watch their financial statements grow, and then talk of further expansion,” Whitmarsh said.

Because CorTrust is family owned with hometown roots, it still feels like a friendly midwestern bank without the constraints of a small bank. What started as an operation serving the needs of local farming families in Artesian, South Dakota, has today grown into a bank with \$1.60 billion in assets, and \$165 million in equity and reserves.

“Whether you’re in need of a banking partner or seeking financing, CorTrust is a partner that can meet you where you’re at and grow with you,” said Kalina. “Having a good relationship with our bank has been extremely important in

making our association run smoothly so we can best serve our members.”

The Paperwork can Wait

CorTrust works hard to find personalized and unique financing opportunities for its customers, and to make sure its banking customers – like MPMA – are thoroughly taken care of.

“That’s what we do. That’s our niche. We’re really customer-service focused,”

Whitmarsh said. “Anytime one of us gets an email from a customer, it goes to the top of our list. We can fill out paperwork later, but our clients are busy and they have other more important things to do than wait for a response to us.”

As we continue to navigate this period of change, having a reliable partner like CorTrust Bank has been invaluable. The bank’s dedication to understanding and

meeting our needs has allowed us to focus on what matters most: growing Minnesota’s manufacturing industry and supporting our members. With CorTrust Bank by our side, we are confident in our ability to lead the industry into the future. ^{PM}

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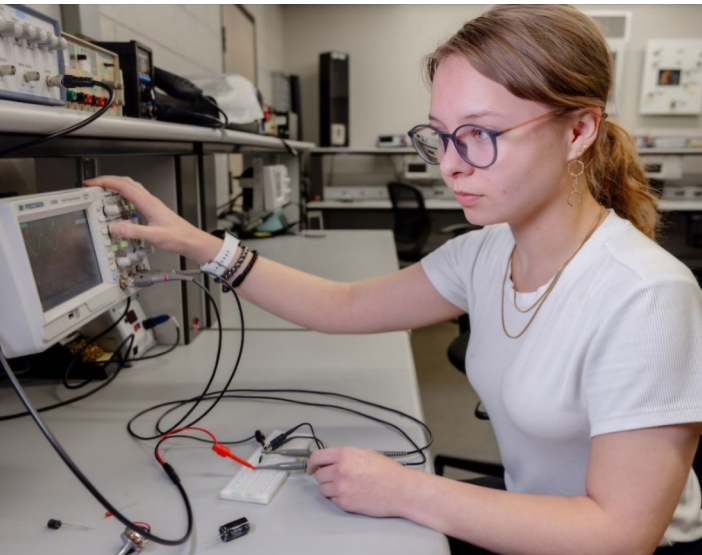
Supported by an \$800,000 Drive for Five grant from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), the Minnesota Manufactured campaign focuses on outreach, recruitment, and retention strategies to expand the pool of qualified candidates. The funding will help connect employers and students with training programs and other educational opportunities throughout Minnesota.

In addition to engaging thousands within the community, the initiative aims to serve two hundred participants and upwards of fifty employers through job placement, diversity, inclusion, and retention services, enhancing the manufacturing talent pool for long-term success.

Strong partnerships with businesses like CorTrust have empowered us to pursue bold initiatives like the Minnesota Manufactured campaign.

Future Faces: *Where Are They Now?*

Catching up with Laurengail Lorenz, Recent Grad and MPMA Committee Member



A 2023 graduate of Elk River High School, Laurengail Lorenz is already well on her way to a successful career in manufacturing.

Since graduation, Lorenz has received a scholarship from MPMA for her studies at Dunwoody School of Technology, presented as a keynote speaker at last year's Celebration of Manufacturing event and recently became the youngest member of the Workforce Development Committee.

We asked Lorenz what her journey has been like so far — including what it's like to be a young woman working in the manufacturing world.

Where did your interest in manufacturing start?

While most people don't start their careers until after they graduate high school, mine started when I was five years old, which is when I was old enough to be at my dad's production studio while he worked on projects. My parents believed in having me with them for two reasons; first, they really wanted me around all the time, and second, to make sure my severe airborne and food allergies were under control. The theory was that this

would help me navigate situations where my allergies were triggered.

In terms of school, my parents were my teachers, showing me what the world had to offer with field trips to the zoo, science museum and library for classes. To accommodate my allergies, I was enrolled in an online public school through 8th grade. Since I could go at my own pace through my online classes, I was able to follow my dad and his dad (my grandpa) around Grandpa's machine shop.

Some of my favorite memories from when I was little are with them working on some crazy project that made my mom just "shake her head at" most of the time. Between building sets for my dad's production studio and seeing how custom parts were made for his projects by Grandpa, I was hooked on the process of manufacturing.

When I entered high school, I started taking ASL classes in-person and was on track for a liberal arts education when the pandemic started and put everything back online. While I was back at home, I was inspired by seeing everything my Grandpa and Dad were building, and I decided to enroll in Elk River Senior High in their Engineering, Manufacturing and Design program, which is where I first got the opportunity to work with CNC equipment.

When I showed up for the first day, I found out that I was the only girl in the class. I pulled out my dad's MIG welder to show my teacher some samples, and my instructor showed the whole class my work as an example and said, "Get used to it, guys — gals' welding will always

look better . . ." I signed up for a second year of the program, and my senior project was to make a single cylinder air motor, with my capstone project of a powered prosthetic leg exoskeleton for people with Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (EDS).

I also managed to land an intern position at Metal Craft, a local medical machining manufacturer. Matt Steuber, the Career and Technical Education Coordinator at Elk River, helped me get full class credit for the work I was doing. I continued working there until I graduated high school on the B Honor Roll in 2023.

We highlighted you a few years ago as one of our Future Faces of Manufacturing -what has life been like for you since graduation?

To use one word, busy! After I graduated high school, I was of course having fun with my friends before we all went our separate ways for college. For me, preparing for a career starts way before you get to college. When I wasn't hanging out with them, I was working and preparing for Dunwoody College of Technology. Prep included Dunwoody's Pathways 2 Careers program (P2C) over the summer after my junior year, which was three weeks of exploring all the programs offered by Dunwoody. During my senior year of high school, Dunwoody's scholarship program required me to attend a Saturday check in once a month. When I started college, I was pleasantly surprised at how easy it was to adjust at Dunwoody. The classes were full of current technology, and I enjoyed them immensely. The course work was very focused on what I knew I'd need to succeed in my chosen field of work, and I was definitely never bored!

What area of manufacturing do you work in now?

What was the road like to find your "niche"?

I currently work in Industrial Automation and Robotics. The road to finding my 'niche' was interesting. In high school, I became extremely interested in manufacturing, engineering, design. . . basically everything the world of technology and innovation has to offer. That interest fueled an exploration into how I could make manufacturing a career. One of my high school teachers told me about a "Cool Jobs Tour" that my school district was participating in for the first time ever, which was designed to expose students to all different sides of manufacturing. If I hadn't signed up for that, I don't know where I'd be today.

The tour featured multiple local manufacturing companies. Dunwoody College of Technology was part of the panel of people hosted by Metal Craft, as well as the dinner for the tour, and the CTE program I mentioned before was one of the panel discussion subjects.

Good things happened fast after that event. I applied for and received the Metal Craft internship. The opportunities happened faster than the paperwork for the school. By the time I met with Mr. Steuber, I already had my internship. By the time I graduated high school, I was in the Quality Control Inspection department working with the machinists on the production line, reducing the number of culls, or the number of items rejected, during the second shift. Unbeknownst to me at the time, I was creating a positive reputation around myself and my work ethic.

Today, I am enrolled at Dunwoody for their Automated Systems and Robotics Program, where I am learning how to design, build and maintain automated systems, including robots. I'm also interning at Graco. I'm planning on becoming an Automation Technician and then on to being a Controls Engineer.

One of the biggest things I've learned is that if you aren't proactive and don't ask questions, you may miss out on some incredible opportunities. I am very grateful for all the encouragement I have received from my teachers in school, outside support for my projects and the career opportunities I've received. I am excited to be in a field where innovation is happening every day. I'm just getting started, and I really believe the sky is the limit for me.

What would you tell women who might be afraid to try a job like this?

I'd say go for it; you won't know until you try. Don't let your fear of failure or your anxiety take over. Remember, your knowledge and self-confidence are in control of your actions, not your fear or anxiety. Whether you are a girl in fifth grade or a person who has been in the industry for years, don't be afraid of new challenges. Your self-confidence will shine through and prove you have earned the right to be there.

I believe that the perceived glass ceiling in the industry is only there because women let it be there. To remove that glass ceiling from the equation, you need self-confidence, a complete knowledge of the industry and the foresight to understand the workplace subculture.

Why did you join the Workforce Committee? What impact would you like to have? What do you want to change or make better?

Firstly, it is an honor to be recommended to the committee based upon my industry experience, combined with my young age. Being on the committee will allow me to help the industry from a younger viewpoint on technology and the manufacturing process. I also want to promote the belief that if you have the capacity to do

a good job as an employee, you should only be judged on performance, and not any other factors.

I feel the biggest impact is to outpace other U.S. competitors through process innovation. In order for our industry to be competitive, we need to continue implementing new ideas about management and production.

One management method I learned as an intern is to have everyone, from the janitorial staff to the president of the company, contribute ideas to make the workplace better and have higher efficiency. A specific change is I want to help reform the pay structure to reflect a person's performance and not the degree they have (or do not have). There are people with equivalent life experience to people with graduate degrees who are paid less simply for not having a degree.

Who have been a few of your biggest influences and supporters?

I have to start by saying my parents and my grandpa, and my godparents. They have been my biggest supporters since I was born. Matt Stueber, my High School CTE internship teacher, was awesome. He was always asking me how my internship was going and keeping me in the know for any scholarships and career opportunities that fit my career goals. At Dunwoody College I am happy to say I have found good people looking out for me too. EJ Daigle, Robotics Dean and Augustine Keitzer, scholarship organizer for P2C (Pathways 2 Careers) are big supporters for my career and robotic projects.

Anything else?

If you decide to go to school for a specific industry, ask lots of questions and constantly adjust your trajectory daily to match the job you want once you graduate. Remember, you are the solution to a potential employer's need! **PM**

MPMA at IMTS

On September 10th & 11th MPMA travelled to Chicago with 85 members to the International Manufacturing Technology Show (IMTS) at McCormick Place in Chicago. It is a full force manufacturing experience with access to over 1 million square feet of exhibitor space. This show only happens every two years, so add this to your 2026 budget now.

Manufacturing Month Tours

October is Minnesota Manufacturing Month, and to celebrate, shops and schools are opening up their doors to the community for tours! Contact steve@mpma.com if you need transportation funding for educational or community tours. If you host a tour, tag MPMA on social media —we'd love to celebrate with you.

Story Time at Well Read Books

On September 14th Well Read Books in Elk River hosted a STEM story time event. Authors of the children's book "Blake Explores Manufacturing" read to attendees, and lead a hands-on activity.

Welcome New Members!

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