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Industrial Occupations Promoted During Manufacturing Day

OCTOBER 20TH 2017 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Poplar Bluff, Missouri - Several factories at Industrial Park partnered to host plant tours for Poplar Bluff Schools on Friday, Oct. 13, during the second annual Manufacturing Day organized to promote job opportunities available locally.

A total of 84 PBHS juniors and seniors signed up to participate in the Missouri Chamber Foundation-sponsored event, along with Technical Career Center and Graduation Center students.

Many people view factories as if they were the “old steel mill plants” of the turn of the 19th century but today’s manufacturing industry is “very high tech” with “good paying jobs” and “in house training,” said Kim Puckett of the human resources department at Briggs and Stratton.

Students toured the small engine factory—the largest in the world, having produced over 80 million engines since 1989, according to Zach Sentell, Briggs and Stratton production area manager. Each of the engines that go through the assembly line are started up to ensure they run smoothly prior to shipping.

More than 75 robots are used in the manufacturing process, Sentell said. Students were introduced to a collaborative robot called Sawyer, by HTE Automation Technologies based in St. Louis, designed to work alongside humans to perform tasks that require

repetitive movement. “Still think we’re just a factory?” Sentell asked rhetorically following the tour.

Gates Corporation, Mid-Continent Steel and Wire, Revere Plastics and Starting USA also hosted students from area schools throughout the day. Instructors from the industrial technology department at Three Rivers College showed students a 3-D printer, among other equipment, and talked about the community college’s career technical studies program, which can be accelerated with transferable credits from technical career centers.

“I tell my students, they can be anything they want to be if they wish to work hard, they just have to want it bad enough,” said Gaelle Freer, Grad Center instructor. “You can start at the bottom of the barrel and work your way all the way to the top, to a management position.”

By the year 2030, 77 percent of skilled baby boomers will have left the manufacturing industry, according to the Manufacturing Institute.

Pictured are Three Rivers industrial technology instructor James Dow (seated) and assistant professor DeAndre Prater discuss with students careers in the manufacturing sector.

Article and photo submitted by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

LAST UPDATED ON OCTOBER 20TH 2017 BY DEE LOFLIN

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