

## CED targets college students

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JOLIET -- Laura Price recently asked college students to name five manufacturers.

Most couldn't.

Then, Price, who was conducting a focus group, gave them hints. The iPods they were carrying were made by ... Apple. Their Razr phones ... Motorola. Once the kids got the hang of it, it was easy Price said.

But that's the problem with the word manufacturing.

"People just see smokestacks and pipes," she explained.

That's one of the reasons Will County Center for Economic Development and the Three Rivers Manufacturers' Association have joined a national program called Dream It, Do It. The program, which was funded by a Department of Labor grant, is designed to help manufacturers recruit more qualified workers. Price, who is program manger for the Three Rivers Education Partnership, is overseeing the local Dream It, Do It program.

John Greuling, CED president and CEO, said he stumbled onto the National Association of Manufacturers' program a couple of years ago and realized it would be a good fit for Will County, which still has quite a bit of old school manufacturing -- like Caterpillar and Exxon Mobile -- and a growing list of modern manufacturing -- Panduit and Andrew, for example.

The local Dream It, Do It effort is in the fundraising phase. Once a \$300,000 fund is established, the money will be used for marketing and education programs targeted to area schools.

"Young people don't have a grasp of what modern manufacturing is," Price said.

All they can think of is old-fashioned assembly lines.

### **Alive and well in U.S.**

"That may have been true for their grandfathers, but that's not true today," she said.

There is another misconception, too, said Gerald Cammano, vice president of the Three Rivers Manufacturers' Association.

"There is a perception out there that manufacturing is dying in the United States," he said. "But a lot of those jobs are going to continue to be here for many, many years."

Youngsters also think manufacturing is "dirty, sweaty" work, Cammano said.

"They said, 'I don't want to do that. I want to have something more exciting in my life.'"

But modern manufacturing is clean with much more instrumentation and a lot of technology, Cammano said.

"You can eat off the floor, that's how clean these plants are," he said.

The Dream It, Do It campaign also will focus on logistics and distribution, the part of the manufacturing process that gets manufactured goods to their final destination, because there are so many in Will County, Greuling said.

### **Building blocks of success**

The campaign will stress that manufacturing jobs now require post-secondary education, but not necessarily a four-year degree, Greuling said. The majority of jobs available today, about 50 percent, require some advanced training, Price said. Thirty percent require four-year degrees, and about 20 percent require only high school training.

So even kids who don't plan to go to school for a four-year degree are probably going to need advanced training, Price said. And they will need to stress something called STEM: science, technology, English and math skills. STEM encompasses the "building blocks" necessary for success on the job, especially in manufacturing, she said.

Later this month, the local Dream It, Do It program will launch a Web site that will list career opportunities and the skills necessary to achieve them. The site eventually will include testimonials from people working at area manufacturing facilities.

For more information, call the Three Rivers Education Partnership, 815-774-6070.

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