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# The Illinois **Manufacturer**

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Fall 2007

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Quality Float Works, Inc.**

**Fortune 500 IMA members**

## Manufacturing-focused high school opens in Chicago



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## Mission Statement

The object for which the Illinois Manufacturers' Association was formed is to strengthen the economic, social, environmental and governmental conditions for manufacturing and allied enterprises in the state of Illinois, resulting in an enlarged business base and increased employment.

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### Share your company news with IMA . . .

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# Manufacturing in the 21st Century



While programs like Austin Polytech will help, they are only the beginning. We must continually strive to meet the needs of manufacturers to find and keep skilled workers.

It's no secret that employers in Illinois and throughout the U.S. are finding it increasingly difficult to find qualified workers to fill job openings. Rising numbers of retiring baby-boomers, coupled with fewer workers entering the labor pool, are forcing manufacturers to make difficult decisions.

In some areas, business, labor and government are pooling their resources to create innovative programs. Take for instance the Austin Polytechnical Academy, the result of a partnership between manufacturers, labor, educational and community leaders and Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley. (See page 16 in this issue of *The Illinois Manufacturer*.) This group of concerned citizens launched the Chicago Manufacturing Renaissance Council (CMRC). Glen Johnson, former IMA Board Chairman, has been a driving force behind the CMRC since its inception more than three years ago.

CMRC has created a polytechnical academy at Austin High School designed to provide Austin's young people with career paths in manufacturing for the 21st Century. This September, 140 freshmen entered Austin's doors to learn about careers in production, management, and even ownership of a manufacturing company. The motivation of the students will determine how far they might go towards landing a rewarding, high-paying, skilled job in the manufacturing sector.

While programs like Austin Polytech will help, they are only the beginning. We must continually strive to meet the needs of manufacturers to find and keep skilled workers. Competition for workers continues to escalate in every sector and, according to experts, this will continue for at least another two decades (when the last of the baby-boom generation reaches age 70).

Some say the availability of foreign labor is part of the solution. However, when it comes to immigration, the possibility of implementing a well-reasoned, national policy has been lost in the chaos in Washington. Others look to outsourcing production to emerging economies like China, India and South Africa — an idea that has as many opponents as proponents.

The current reality is that "Made in America" is quickly becoming "Made in America, but not necessarily by Americans," or even worse, "used to be Made in America."

With the other challenges facing industry today — soaring energy prices, higher taxes, higher prices for raw materials, transportation costs, out-of-control health care costs, etc. — how will manufacturers meet the challenges of a shrinking skilled labor pool?

There are three things we can do right now. First and foremost, we need to communicate that careers in manufacturing are highly desirable. We know that many manufacturing jobs in Illinois pay well over \$50,000 per year — more than \$7,000 above Illinois' average statewide salary. These are the kinds of jobs that provide the opportunity to realize the American dream of homeownership; of sending children to college and also of securing a good retirement. At both the local and state level, we must do better at communicating that these are truly great jobs.

Secondly, education and training in the skills used in today's manufacturing environment should be offered in every school district, not just certain areas of the state — areas where a handful of gifted leaders recognize manufacturing's contribution to the fabric of the community. Curricula can be easily modified to teach industry-related skill sets. These skills include but are not limited to computer science, drafting and intuitive thinking. We have to begin culling out middle-school students who exhibit skills in math and critical thinking. In order to stimulate students' natural curiosity, we need to emulate after-school programs like those in districts that partner with the Illinois Math and Science Academy.

And lastly, Congress must develop a sound national immigration policy. Clearly, the current number of H-1B visas is inadequate. Cunning applicants can, and often do, present fraudulent documentation — succeeding at fooling even the most scrupulous HR professionals. This results in placing employers in jeopardy of violating the law. Washington recently announced a crack-down on employers, with possible fines being levied of \$10,000 for each illegal worker hired. Well meaning state governments have tried to fill the gap, but really should stop implementing their own immigration laws. The current hodge-podge of state policies needs to be repealed.

We may never see a return to the "glory years" of manufacturing, and maybe that's not what our goal should be. But when we put "Made in America" on a product, it should continue to mean "quality," not just in this country, but throughout the world. ■

# Chicago's first manufacturing-focused high school opens its doors



Dan Swinney (left), executive director of the Chicago Manufacturing Renaissance Council, accompanies Principal Bill Gerstein (third from left, back row) and other staff members and teachers from Austin Polytechnical Academy on a tour of Brach Candy over the summer.



Austin Polytech Principal Bill Gerstein (left) and the Dean of Students, Rev. Kenneth Jones (right), discuss robotics technology with an employee of Winzeler Gear, a manufacturer of plastic gears, during a tour of the company's Harwood Heights facility.

Dan Swinney (standing), executive director of the Chicago Manufacturing Renaissance Council, addresses students in Austin Polytechnical Academy's summer program.

By T. Shawn Taylor

**C**an a school make a difference in the profitability and sustainability of manufacturing companies and communities?

That was the challenge posed two years ago to an exclusive design team brought together to create a high school dedicated to educating a future generation of highly-skilled, modern-day manufacturing employees, managers and owners. The result: Austin Polytechnical Academy, Chicago's first manufacturing-focused high school.

Located in the historic Austin community on Chicago's West Side, Austin Polytech opened its doors on September 4th with a freshman class of 145 students. The school is a project of the Chicago Manufacturing Renaissance Council (CMRC), a partnership of business, labor, government, educators and community leaders founded in July 2005 to promote programs and policies to sustain and grow Illinois' manufacturing economy.

"Austin Polytechnical Academy is a uniquely creative approach to preparing students for careers in manufacturing," said Gregory W. Baise, president and CEO of the Illinois Manufacturers' Association

(IMA). "The result of a partnership made up of manufacturers, labor, government and educators, Austin Polytech shows what can be achieved today to guarantee Illinois manufacturing has leaders for the future."

A recent article in *The American Prospect* magazine described Austin Polytech as "a new sort of vocational school: one that increases, rather than constrains, options. It will not only prepare students for college, but do so more intensely than surrounding schools."

"I want to congratulate and particularly thank Mayor Richard M. Daley, Chicago Public Schools' CEO Arne Duncan, Margaret Blackshire, the past president of the Illinois AFL-CIO, and especially Glen Johnson, the IMA's former Board chairman. Their efforts are the cornerstone of this program," Baise said.

Forming and sustaining partnerships with manufacturers to provide educational and financial support will be fundamental to the school's success, organizers say. The Chicago Public School's per-pupil allocation falls short of what is needed to support the school's innovative, industry-specific programs and its commit-

ment to a longer school day, to be held from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm.

On September 12, a fundraiser for the school is being held at Arthur Machinery, 2501 Landmeier Road, in Elk Grove Village, from 4:00-6:00 pm, to inform company owners and managers about the school and how they can contribute to its mission. Co-sponsors of the event include Arthur Machinery; the IMA; S&C Electric Co.; Winzeler Gear; Bison Gear and Engineering Corp.; DeCardy Diecasting; P-K Tool and Manufacturing Co.; Hudson Precision Products Co.; and the Tooling & Manufacturing Association. Organizers have set a fundraising goal of at least \$40,000 to match a challenge grant that would help pay for an industrial coordinator position at the school. (To attend, please RSVP with Kimberly Harr at 847-593-1610 or at kharr@arthurmachinery.com).

"The manufacturing economy in Illinois requires workers with various skills levels and abilities to ensure the continued growth and vitality of manufacturing firms competing in the global economy," said Dan Swinney, executive director of the CMRC. "Austin Polytech students

will graduate with the knowledge base to compete in the world market.”

The students will be taught from a nationally-recognized pre-engineering curriculum known as Project Lead the Way and will have access to coaching, mentoring and job opportunities through the 24 manufacturing companies that have, so far, joined the Austin Polytech partnership. Upon graduation, students will have earned one or more industry credentials under the National Institute of Metalworking Standards (NIMS).

“Austin Polytech students will be prepared to go on to college or to enter the workforce, whichever they choose,” Swinney said. “In manufacturing, we’re encouraging them to aspire to high-skilled production positions, management and, one day, ownership.”

The school also enjoys the support of the organizations and individuals that comprise the Council’s governing body — four co-chairs that personify the uniqueness of the partnership and the clout it wields: David Hanson, commissioner of the Mayor’s Office of Workforce Development; Glen Johnson, former IMA Board chairman; Kathleen Nelson, acting commissioner for the Chicago Department of Planning and Development; and Jorge Ramirez, secretary-treasurer of the Chicago Federation of Labor.

As the school year was set to begin, excitement about Austin Polytech moved up another notch with the announcement of a robotics team, an initiative made possible under the Chicago Public Schools’ Afterschool Matters program, which exposes students to hands-on career courses taught by industry professionals. The team, sponsored by Motorola Corp., will be lead by an industry professional. About 20 students will be given the challenge of building a robot out of a box of raw materials. The students will meet for one hour, four days a week for 22 weeks, and will submit their entry into the *FIRST* Robotics Competition, which reached more than 32,500 high school students on 1,307 teams in 37 regional competitions in its flagship year in 2007 (See box at right).

“There are a million different ways to make a robot from those materials,” said Principal Bill Gerstein, who added that the com-

see **HIGH SCHOOL**, page 18



## The *FIRST* Robotics Competition

### WHAT IS IT?

A unique varsity sport of the mind designed to help high-school-aged young people discover how interesting and rewarding the life of engineers and researchers can be.

### WHAT IS UNIQUE?

- It is a sport where the participants play with the pros and learn from them.
- Designing and building a robot is a fascinating real-world professional experience.
- Competing on stage brings participants as much excitement and adrenaline rush as conventional varsity tournaments.
- The game rules are a surprise every year.

### HOW IT WORKS

The *FIRST* Robotics Competition stages short games played by remote-controlled robots. The robots are designed and

built in six weeks (out of a common set of basic parts) by a team of 15 to 25 high-school-aged young people and a handful of engineers-mentors. The students pilot the robots on the field.

Each school year, teams are formed in the fall. Competitions take place in March and April. The *FIRST* Robotics Competition Regional events are typically held in university arenas. They involve 40 to 70 teams cheered by thousands of fans over two and a half days. A championship event caps the season. Referees oversee the competition. Judges present awards to teams for design, technology, sportsmanship and commitment to *FIRST*. The Chairman’s Award is *FIRST*’s highest honor.

For more information, contact *FIRST* at 200 Bedford Street, Manchester, NH 03101, 800.871.8326, [www.usfirst.org](http://www.usfirst.org)

## HIGH SCHOOL

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petition was created by Dean Kamen, the inventor of the "Segway," a high-tech, people-mover vessel best-known in Illinois for its use by Chicago beat police patrolling in the downtown area.

"The team that builds the most innovative robot wins it," Gerstein said, adding: "We thought that based on the model of the school that we have that we should have a robotics team."

Austin Polytech will be one of two schools located within the former Austin High School building at 231 North Pine Street. Gerstein said that \$20 million in renovations, including exterior upgrades and a new roof, will be ongoing throughout the 2007-2008 academic year. The school will draw more than 90 percent of its student body from the Austin community. Fifty-four percent

of the students are girls, according to Bernina Brazier, assistant principal.

During the summer, 40 of the 145 incoming freshmen participated in a summer program designed to help students bone up on their English and math skills before the start of the school year. Gerstein said that many of the students were especially deficient in math. Incoming freshman Miya Bell said she feels ready to tackle Algebra now.

"I've got a whole new attitude about math. Before, I didn't like math. But now, I like it," said the 15-year-old Bell. "The teacher does a good job of explaining it and making it interesting."

The summer program was held at the Chicago Park District's LaFollette Park while the building underwent renovations. Students also took part in an electronics class that served as a primer to the world of high-tech manufacturing and participated in a tour of Eli's Cheesecake. Eli's is one of the school's partner companies.

"A food company like Eli's was a

great introduction into manufacturing," Swinney said. "Eli's is a great place for kids. Food manufacturing is a key sector of our manufacturing economy."

During the Eli's tour, Brazier brimmed with pride as the students, dressed in colorful T-shirts emblazoned with the school's logo, eagerly shot up their hands to answer questions posed by assistant marketing manager Brian Cravens, who led the tour.

"If these kids are an example of what we can expect from the freshman class, then we're going to have an outstanding student body," Brazier said. ■

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