

STILL ALIVE AND WELL

Manufacturers show wares

Consortium links jobs, job seekers

By **JEREMY JOHNSON**
Eagle News Intern

BUTLER TWP — The Butler County Manufacturing Consortium held a manufacturing technology expo Friday and Saturday to allow job seekers a chance to talk to manufacturers.

"It seems that the idea is that manufacturing is dead, but in fact it's very much alive in Butler County," said Lisa Campbell, interim director of business and industry training at Butler County Community College, where the expo was held.

"Some of the giants have gone away, but several smaller manufacturers have filled the void."

"What we want people to realize is that the manufacturing industry is not the dirty job that your father had. Nowadays it's a very clean, high-tech, controlled environment," said Jim Ferguson, chairman of the manufacturing consortium. He also is the human resources manager for Penn United.

"People should know that what's made here in Butler County touches the world," he said. "So many products made here are in everyday items. We at Penn United make products that do everything from save lives to make the world go 'round."



DAVE PRELOSKY/BUTLER EAGLE

Bill Milbert, a student at Butler County Community College, speaks with Neil Ashbaugh of Oberg Industries about manufacturing employ-

ment opportunities on Friday during the Butler County Manufacturing Consortium at the college.

Seventeen vendors attended the expo along with representatives from Robert Morris University and PA Career Link, who were available to help prospective employees find information.

Peggy Weckerly, PA Career Link administrator, described the relationship between that agency and the consortium.

"We're sort of the worker bees for them," she said. "We provide people with information, we allow them to have monthly meetings at our facilities, and we provide informa-

tion and help fill jobs for applicants."

Kristen Bastaja of Penn United said a job in manufacturing is not just for people who don't want to go on to higher education. Instead, she said, people can work in manufacturing to build job skills or to help toward a degree or another career path.

Bill Milbert, a 20-year-old BC3 student, found the expo to be helpful.

"I enjoy working with my hands," he said. "So when I heard about a manufacturing

expo, I thought I should check it out. I know Lisa Campbell through the school and she recommended that I come."

He said the information there was beneficial, and it gives him options for what he decides to do after completing his degree at BC3.

Orin Fisher and Muthu Murugan attended the expo, but for different reasons. They are starting a bio-medical company, and are currently working out of Fisher's basement. They are looking for

■ See Show on Page D7

Show

■ From Page D6

manufacturers they could subcontract work out to.

Fisher said they hope to have a demonstration product by June, and time is of the essence.

"We heard about this expo and thought it would be a good chance to find some local talent," Fisher said. "Because we're still in the start-up stages, we're hoping to find companies that can take on some of the work we're not able to do."

While it may seem these manufacturers would compete against one another for business, the opposite is true. The consortium emphasizes "strength in working together," as in its motto.

Weckerly said the companies work together and find they were able to help each other.

"Companies may be looking for someone who specializes in a certain area," she said. "From networking with other manufacturers in the consortium, they can find them or find someone through them."

A diverse grouping of manufacturers backs up Weckerly's words. Machine part and specialty metal manufacturers such as Penn United, Oberg Industries, and II-VI meet and talk with companies such as JSP and IDL, which offer different services.

Amy Fifield, production supervisor of the molding department of JSP, attended the expo to showcase energy absorbers, sound dampeners, and fire retardants used in anything from cars and cubicle walls to horse blankets.

IDL, a point of purchase merchandising company, was also on hand.

"The nice thing about us is that it's a very prideful job," human resources representative Brandi Heichel said. "You can be out shopping and show your family and friends what you do. We're sort of the new kids on the block, and when Jim (Ferguson) invited us out here, we thought it would be a great chance to show everyone what we do."

The consortium is out to prove that manufacturing is alive and well in the county.

"What many may not realize is that this area of the country is above average in terms of pay, resources, quality, and benefits," Ferguson said. "Every manufacturer in the consortium is a growing and thriving business."

According to resources provided by the consortium, 170,000 plus jobs in manufacturing make up about 15 per cent of the employment in southwestern Pennsylvania, making it the second largest source of employment in the region.