

25-070106-01

**TODAY'S TOPIC:
MANUFACTURING**

Manufacturers talk amongst themselves



By Craig Woerpel

Upper Peninsula Business Today

ESCANABA — Manufacturers in the Central Upper Peninsula and across the U.P. are coming together to discuss common issues such as skilled worker shortages and adequate training in groups called Michigan Regional Skill Alliances (MiRSA) in an effort to find solutions for the industry.

Northern Michigan University applied for a \$75,000 grant last year to establish a RSA called the U.P. Regional Industrial Manufacturing Skills Alliance (UP-RIMSA). It is split into three groups supported by the local Michigan Works! agencies. They are meeting in the Eastern, Central and Western parts of the U.P.

“We're all the same for the manufacturing group but each section of the U.P. is working at their own pace on it,” said Holly Peoples of the Michigan Works! The Job Force Board in Escanaba.

The group in the Central U.P. met in April and May and plan another meeting July 20.

One of the issues discussed at the
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■ UP-RIMSA: Manufacturers talk about issues

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meeting was a shortage of skilled workers. Peoples said NMU found that manufacturing accounts for 22.3 percent of the jobs in the U.P. yet only 10 percent of high school students are considering a career in manufacturing jobs. Yet, wages are higher in manufacturing than other industries in the U.P. and the growth of manufacturing jobs in the U.P. exceeds the national average.

"Northern had done a bunch of research and they found that in many areas of the U.P. there was kind of a hidden worker shortage primarily for welders, CNC machine operators and other kinds of assembly jobs that you can't walk off the street and not have any background knowledge, skills and abilities to do. It used to be that manufacturing was more low skilled work but now, technology has come along and the products are a lot more high tech and the processes that people have to do are complicated so they need a higher level of skilled individuals walking through the door," Peoples said.

The focus of the UP-RIMSA is on

electrical, mechanical, welding, industrial technicians and management.

The group has already discussed the possibility of providing material to students and parents that discusses what

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Michigan Works! The Job Force Board

the benefits of working for manufacturing companies in the region are.

"So we can try to get people to start thinking of manufacturing as a viable career early on in school so they can start taking the classes they need to take," said Peoples.

In the instance of a welder, Peoples said students need to be shown what type of education is needed to be a welder, why other welders like their jobs and where they can go to get training.

To help understand the needs of the manufacturing industry in the Central U.P., surveys were sent out to 150 companies asking questions about the skill levels needed for entry level jobs and the skills that applicants are lacking.

The results of the survey will be presented at the July meeting.

The goal listed by the group at the April meeting include:

- Increased applicant pool of potential workers.
- Improvements in the skills of current and potential workers.
- Improved business performance, which increases the competitiveness of the industry.
- Attraction of other employers in the industry and of supplier firms to the region.
- Over the long term, more jobs and better opportunities for advancement for workers.

Peoples said they also focused on training.

"We know there is a lot of training programs out there and some employers know about some and some employers know about others but they want to put together an inventory of what's out there and this is what it costs. If the survey comes back and it says they need training on skills that there aren't trainings for in this area, well now we need to go to some of our training providers and say, 'can you provide this?'" she said.

Once the survey is completed and needs are set the group can develop and implement programs to respond to their needs.

"At the July meeting we should have some momentum going as far as some actual action that can be taken," Peoples said.

There are 25 MiRSAs in the state. MiRSAs in other U.P. industries include health care, construction and forestry.

To be a part of UP-RIMSA contact Peoples at 906-789-0558, ext 215 or call your local Michigan Works! agency.