



Northwest Illinois Economic Development Hosts Annual Workforce Development Program



By Barbara Sue Grass, Program Coordinator for NWILED

While Northwest Illinois Economic Development's main goals are to spearhead economic development structures, funding, and programs in Northwest Illinois, it has also developed and implemented programs that are often beyond what many municipalities and communities may offer, not only to enhance business development but also to spearhead workforce development.

One of NWILED's most popular events is its annual Manufacturing & Trades Day, an educational, targeted, hands-on career outreach program that promotes workforce development, career awareness, and youth retention. NWILED partners with the Jo Daviess Carroll Career Technical Educational Academy (CTEA) in producing the event. The program is designed to connect high school students with real-world career opportunities from traditional manufacturing to transportation, healthcare, energy, skilled trades, and more, helping them understand the quality of life and economic potential available in the region after graduation.

High school students have two parts to their days. Part of the day is spent visiting a large modern manufacturing plant for a site tour to see firsthand the work environments and skills required for employment with our area's large employers. Following the site visits students have a "Pop Up" experience where a utility or municipal field crew meets up with them for about 20

minutes in the plant parking lot to show off their truck and equipment and to speak with them about a day in the life as a field technician or operator.

The second part of students' day is spent at the CTEA where they participate in interactive sessions led by trade professionals and instructors from regional agencies and Highland Community College who give insight into trade and manufacturing career pathways. At the end of their day, students hear about roughly 25 career options available here in northwest Illinois with area employers.

By engaging students early, NWILED aims to attract and prepare talent for local employers, reducing the "outward migration" of youth and strengthening the regional labor force.

Manufacturing & Trades Day is a regional event that is not only fun for students, but it also creates a workforce development opportunity for employers. Since its inception in 2022, 1,500 students from nine high schools in Carroll and Jo Daviess counties have participated, plus Lena-Winslow High in Stephenson County.

In the past, dozens of businesses and agencies have participated by opening their doors for tours or setting up booths at the CTEA trade show location. NWILED encourages businesses to register to host site visits, run interactive stations, or to participate in a "Pop Up."

"This event is all about workforce development and youth retention. It is NWILED's hope that by offering this experience to our region's students that they better understand the opportunities and quality of life available to them here after they graduate high school," said David Schmit, NWILED Regional Director. "Our goal is to bring attention to local quality, in-demand career opportunities here in Northwest Illinois."

For more information about Northwest Illinois Economic Development, go to www.nwiled.org. With 17 years in business, NWILED's office is located at 1 Commercial Drive, Suite 2, Hanover, Illinois. Their phone number is 815-297-7361. The organization has active accounts on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram.