



Northwest Illinois Economic Development Supports Career Development with Special Programming



By Barbara Sue Grass, Program Coordinator for NWILED

Although economic development organizations play a crucial role in fostering their community's economic growth, they also advance these goals through additional initiatives that strengthen their mission. For example, they create and host special events and programs that indirectly support professional development. One such event sponsored by Northwest Illinois Economic Development is the annual Manufacturing & Trades Day. This event not only focuses on high school career building in Jo Daviess and Carroll counties, but also highlights the many participating businesses and organizations.

NWILED, in partnership with the Jo Daviess Carroll Career Technical Education Academy (CTEA), is hosting its fifth annual educational career event this fall. This occasion allows manufacturers, trades, and logistics companies to open their doors to showcase the potential of modern manufacturing and to foster interest in related careers. All high schools in Carroll and Jo Daviess counties are invited to participate.

Since the program began in 2022, an estimated 1,500 students have benefited from the experience by being exposed to a diverse range of industries, including traditional manufacturing, transportation, healthcare, and energy. The event takes students to local

manufacturing facilities for site visits and to the CTEA for interactive, hands-on learning sessions led by area trades-focused businesses and small manufacturers. These sessions showcase the potential of their industries and foster career interest. The event also features several local agencies and schools that provide information on apprenticeship and trade school opportunities. New to the program in 2025 were “Utility Pop Ups” where utility and municipal field crews met with students after their site visits in plant parking lots to showcase their rigs and discuss a day in the life of a field line worker.

“This event focuses on workforce development and youth retention. NWILED hopes that by providing this experience to our region’s students, they will gain a better understanding of the opportunities and quality of life available to them here after graduating from high school,” said David Schmit, NWILED Regional Director. “Our goal is to highlight local, high-quality, in-demand career opportunities in Northwest Illinois.”

Annually, the event attracts more than 330 students and over 30 businesses and agencies.

Chad Stenberg, Executive Director of the Jo Daviess Carroll Career Technical Education Academy, said, “Manufacturing Day is a great part of Career and Technical Education (CTE)! It gives students a chance to see all the amazing career opportunities right here in our community. Every year, I’m inspired by how our local businesses and partners step up to help students explore their future paths.”

The next event is scheduled for Thursday, October 8, 2026. NWILED extends an open invitation to any business interested in participating in this day-long workforce development experience. Opportunities to engage include offering site visits, leading a hands-on session at the CTEA or doing a utility type popup.

For more information about participating in Manufacturing & Trades Day, interested businesses can contact NWILED directly at 815-297-7361 or via email at dschmit@nwiled.org.