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Dave Maurer – Humphrey Products – 2015 John G. Thodis Michigan Manufacturer of the Year Award

It's no secret that finding, training and retaining talent has become a top priority for manufacturers. As national surveys point to a staggering disconnect between Americans who view the industry as "important" or "very important" to the economy and those who would urge their children to start a career in manufacturing, employers in states where manufacturing is a crucial part of the economy, like Michigan, must view the attraction of future workers as necessary for survival.

Dave Maurer's passion for finding innovative approaches to meet the industry's talent challenges is evident in everything he does. For this, he is the recipient of the 2015 John G. Thodis Michigan Manufacturer of the Year (Large Tier) Award.

"It's important for us as manufacturers and community leaders to do all we can to showcase the great manufacturing career opportunities available in Kalamazoo and across the state," said Maurer, vice president of operations and the chief financial officer for Humphrey Products. "Children might only be 25 percent of our population, but they are 100 percent of our future – this is one challenge that manufacturers cannot afford to lose."

Humphrey Products is a leader in the manufacture of pneumatic valves, actuators and other essential products for both the fluid power and fluid control industries. Started in 1901, the employer of over 250 men and women must deal with an extremely diverse, global market and supply to a broad range of needs.

Very few people would fault Maurer if he chose to focus solely on running a business requiring such constant management. That's the last thing Dave Maurer would do. His mind is constantly looking to the future – for his company, his employees and his community.

"The best social support program we can offer a person is a secure, good paying job," said Maurer. "Manufacturing offers that in ways few other industries can match. Now we have to focus on getting that message out into the community."

Kalamazoo is thriving when it comes to developing initiatives to combat manufacturing's talent shortage. With dozens of programs designed to bridge the employer-educator gap, Maurer could have chosen just one to partner with, however he took a step beyond what is expected and did something extraordinary – he's involved in everything.

Maurer is more than just a name on a list of program participants. He is an advocate for manufacturing in the truest sense of the word.

Maurer sees the importance of industry partnership but also knows that leadership is required to accomplish real change. His name and reputation are attached to everything he does, so it is no surprise that everything he is involved in has the support of the Kalamazoo community and attracts the attention of other talent-focused leaders.

"Kalamazoo County's Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) initiative may not have happened without Dave's support," said Jason Luke, program administrator of Kalamazoo Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) and the 2014 Manufacturing Talent Champion. "Dave personally sent e-mails, made phone calls and visited businesses to solicit the necessary funding to get the program started. Thanks to his help and leadership, as a champion of talent development, many significant programs are now thriving."

"Dave is our ambassador to the local manufacturing community," said Kevin Wixson, executive director of the Kalamazoo Innovation Initiative. "He has been and remains a champion for revitalizing the manufacturing workforce pipeline and ensuring every manufacturer can locate qualified, skilled talent."



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“Dave is a driving force behind hundreds of local students who have now experienced hands-on, relevant work experience that will be with them for the rest of their lives,” said Tom VanderMolen, president of Junior Achievement of Southwest Michigan. “Whether bringing them into his business or visiting a classroom to share the excitement of manufacturing, Dave is teaching today’s students the value of a manufacturing career.”

“The effort Dave puts in each day has raised community awareness of the great career opportunities within manufacturing,” said Craig Jbara, vice president of strategic and economic development for Kalamazoo Valley Community College (KVCC). “Dave is a proven catalyst, promoter and leader. He has been instrumental in helping KVCC elevate manufacturing in Michigan.”

The Kalamazoo County region is full of employers and manufacturing partners willing to step up and that has created many opportunities for Maurer and Humphrey Products to collaborate on talent issues.

“For a company like Humphrey, we can’t fix the talent challenges on our own so partnerships are essential,” said Maurer. “The only way we can achieve the necessary changes to policy and talent development initiatives on the scale that is required is to be in cooperation with other like-minded manufacturers.”

The list of workforce development programs and initiatives supported by Maurer includes the Southwest Michigan Advanced Manufacturing Career Consortium, RESA, the Education for Employment Council, the Hired! Manufacturing 2014 Career Fair, Southwest Michigan’s rollout of the Michigan Advanced Technician Training Program (MAT2), Humphrey Products’ own internship program and service on the Michigan Works! Southwest Workforce Development Board.

Each event and program that Humphrey Products sponsors is taken very seriously. Maurer sees community networking as furthering the positive image of manufacturing. He works tirelessly to go above and beyond what is expected and promotes manufacturing as a viable, exciting career option. His commitment to branding the manufacturing industry is more than just part of a job; for him, it is securing the future of Michigan’s greatest resource – its manufacturing workforce.

“We continue to run into the stigma of what manufacturing was rather than what manufacturing is,” said Maurer. “Students, parents, teachers – the way each of these groups think about the industry goes a long way in determining if they consider it a valuable career path. We cannot depend on the solutions falling into our lap – we must seek them out. It must begin with us.”

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