



PROFILE OF EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

Finger Lakes Advanced Manufacturers' Enterprise Geneva, New York

About FAME

The Finger Lakes Advanced Manufacturers' Enterprise (FAME) is an initiative of the Finger Lakes Workforce Investment Board and a collaborative public/private partnership of regional stakeholders. The organization is focusing on efforts to "attract and grow the workforce talent in advanced manufacturing," adopting the motto "FAME *builds minds that make it.*"

FAME was started, in part, through the impetus of Mike Mandina, owner of Optimax, a growing optics manufacturing firm that was having a hard time filling jobs and for whom a large percentage of workers were nearing retirement.

Mandina could see that, with too few young persons with the right skills applying for work, the difficulty in filling jobs at Optimax was just going to get worse. He started a grassroots effort to talk with students and educators about advanced manufacturing. He wanted students and educators to understand that today's manufacturing is more about using critical thinking skills and information technology (through Computer Numerical Controls) to run the manufacturing process, in contrast to the traditional view that manufacturing is repetitive, low-skilled and dirty.

Other companies were facing the same challenge, and knew that public perception was the biggest obstacle they faced. Mandina and other company leaders came together, working with the Finger Lakes Workforce Investment Board to start a non-profit organization to reach out to schools and counselors.

Dan Gersbach of G.W. Lisk describes the strength of FAME by saying "the power is in our numbers." Rather than each individual company working on its own to reach out to schools and the community, "we can bring the same type of program into the different regions we serve."

The organization includes over 60 manufacturing enterprises and is supported through membership dues and local IDAs (Industrial Development Agencies). Michele Stolberg, FAME's part-time facilitator, wears many hats, one of which is to help students to find work-based learning internships. Another role is to coordinate teacher requests for guest speakers, matching volunteer business professionals with classroom needs. She also helps coordinate special events, and works with the committees on their key priorities.

There are five committees within FAME:

- **Executive Committee** with the focus to "*Direct FAME's vision and strategic partnerships efforts.*"
- **Communications & Outreach Committee** with the focus to "*Raise awareness about the importance of and opportunities in advanced manufacturing.*"

- **Hiring and Training Committee** with the focus to *“Improve collaboration with workforce educators and help advanced manufacturing companies recruit, hire and train skilled workers.”*
- **Membership Committee** with the focus to *“Build FAME’s membership across its many stakeholder groups,”* and
- **Pipeline Committee** with the focus to *“Build a pipeline of skilled qualified advanced manufacturing candidates by engaging K-12 youth in pursuing manufacturing careers.”*

The Pipeline Committee

As noted, the purpose of the Pipeline Committee is to engage K-12 youth in learning about manufacturing careers. The chair of the Pipeline Committee, Eileen Rucinski of Kelly Services, noted the importance of involving school personnel in the work of the committee. While the committee was originally only comprised of business partners, it has more recently invited school counselors, principals and a superintendent to be part of the committee. These members become advocates for the program, and also help the committee better understand the needs and concerns of school districts.

Rucinski elaborated that “the more people we get from the schools and districts, to get their input, the better...Before, we were going off blind; with their input, we know where we need to focus.” She added that the Pipeline Committee also plans to begin building visibility and awareness among school board members.

FAME leaders hope that, over time, school districts will see the benefits of making time and resources available for student tours to manufacturing sites; some members of FAME believe they are already starting to see more entry level trade people, and they expect to see more benefits in the future.

Partnership Tours: students and counselors

One of the primary activities of the Pipeline Committee is to organize student tours of local advanced manufacturing facilities, so that students get a first hand look at modern manufacturing. Rucinski says that when students tour the facilities, “You can see the amazement on their faces” as they see what advanced manufacturing actually is.

During the first years of the effort, the tours were focused on middle school students. In 2012, there were tours organized for 12 companies, and the average group size was 20 students, serving a total of about 240 students. In 2012-2013, the committee decided to open up tours to high school students as well.

In its original formulation, tours included two manufacturing sites. The committee discovered that middle school students didn’t have the stamina or attention to go to two sites back to back. Instead, it seemed to be more effective to focus on a single tour site, and give a deeper experience at the one site.

One of the founding members of FAME that continues to be highly involved is G.W. Lisk, a manufacturer of solenoids for automotive, aviation and military uses, as well as LVDTs and flame arrestors. The company employs about 500 people, including about 70 engineers and about 250 workers in manufacturing and machining.

Lisk hosted around 15 tours in the most recent school year. During the tour, company representatives highlight one product that the company makes, then walk students through the entire process of

designing, assembling, testing and shipping that product, physically moving across the plant. This way, students get a sense of the full “life cycle” of manufacturing. Shop manager Dan Gersbach says that the main outcome that Lisk is seeking is “to have a pipeline for the future.”

Some districts have noted the financial challenge of offering tours, so FAME offers to pay the cost of school bus rental for the tours. Depending on the distance students must travel and the time involved, that cost can range from between \$250 and \$400 per tour.

Along with the students, there is usually a guidance advisor or a technology education teacher. With local Boy Scout troops, there were many parents who also attended.

Student Essays for Learning and Visibility

Part of the facility tour experience is that students are given a set of questions they are supposed to investigate during the tour, and then students are required to write a short essay about their tour experience, addressing those questions.

The Pipeline Committee members review the essays and select the top three, providing an award and gift to the winning students. The committee makes these awards during local school board meetings in the districts from which the winners were selected. This helps bring the initiative to the attention of the school boards and provides public recognition for the winning students.

Partnership Outreach and Visibility

FAME is fortunate to have a former school principal currently in the role of Advanced Manufacturing Career Navigator through the Finger Lakes WIB. He visits schools in all nine WNY counties, talking about the advanced manufacturing sector with students, teachers and school counselors. This effort is funded through a U.S. Department of Labor Grant until 2015. The grant has also provided financial assistance for about 100 high school graduates in its first year who are seeking postsecondary education in the field of advanced manufacturing. Other volunteers from the manufacturing sector also help by making presentations in local schools.

To raise visibility, FAME also hosts public events to position advanced manufacturing as part of the broader conversation about school improvement in New York. In January 2013, it held a College and Career Readiness Summit with about 200 people in attendance, including principals, teachers and approximately 25 local superintendents. Dr. Willard Daggett, founder of the International Center for Leadership in Education, gave a keynote address at the event.

Partnership Offers Summer Advanced Manufacturing Institute

Another key feature of FAME’s pipeline activities is an intensive summer institute that it offers for high school students interested in advanced manufacturing. FAME works closely with Monroe Community College (MCC) and Finger Lakes Community College (FLCC) to run the six-week institute. The program offers students three college credits, worth over \$1,000, at no charge to the program’s 15 participating students. During the session, students spend four days of hands-on learning at MCC, visiting a local manufacturing site on the final day.

The summer program is very selective: students must complete an application, be recommended by a school counselor, meet academic readiness expectations, and a faculty team from MCC makes the final selection of the 15 participants.

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