

Chamber demonstrates innovation, leadership with Project Mini-Chopper

Despite the proliferation of news reports that manufacturing is dying or making a vast overseas exodus, it remains a vital employer in Manitowoc County, with 31% of the county's jobs in manufacturing.

The world of manufacturing is changing, however. No longer the repetitive, monotonous jobs of our forefathers, today's manufacturing provides dynamic careers, utilizing cutting-edge technology and creativity. Employers are seeking workers with technical skills, in addition to important soft skills such as innovation, problem-solving and teamwork. The challenge lies in communicating this important message.

Hence the birth of Project Mini-Chopper.

Co-sponsored by The Chamber of Manitowoc County and The Economic Development Corporation of Manitowoc County, the mission of Project Mini-Chopper is to improve the **image of manufacturing** and help students, parents, educators and the community to understand that manufacturing provides excellent career opportunities, which will help **create a skilled and professional workforce** to meet local **manufacturing and economic needs**...today and in the future.

Teams from Manitowoc County schools are paired with a local company sponsor who is very involved through design approval and mentoring throughout the project. The curriculum is delivered by the school's Tech Ed teacher, or in the case of one team, by LTC. The project is fully funded by corporate sponsorships, grants and donations, both monetary and in-kind.

In addition to teamwork and problem-solving, the students are learning a plethora of skills, including mechanical design, welding, painting, budget and project management, electro-mechanical, quality control, safety, marketing, public speaking, time management, and information technology.

Benefits to students:

- learning **hands-on** engineering, manufacturing skills through design and construction of a mini-chopper
- earning **transcripted college credits** while having fun
- **establishing relationships** with company sponsors

Benefits to company sponsors and community:

- **builds excitement** for skilled manufacturing careers
- enhanced public knowledge about **technical and manufacturing careers** available in Manitowoc County

Project Mini-Chopper debuted at the 2008 Ant Hill Mob Annual Bike Show in April 2008, with the official kickoffs taking place in September 2008 at a breakfast and tour held at each sponsoring company's location.

To help get the creative juices flowing, the teams traveled to Lacrosse in June 2008 to attend the S&S 50th Anniversary Bike Show, an event showcasing bike builders from around the world and their creations. The event was a great opportunity for the teams to get design and build ideas for their choppers.

Culmination of Project Mini-Chopper is being planned with a public unveiling at the 2009 Ant Hill Mob Annual Bike Show, where student teams will showcase their choppers and explain how their team designed, built and managed their project. Each team will be judged in builder's class categories by show attendees.

Four teams from three Manitowoc County schools are participating in the project's inaugural year:

- Roncalli High School, sponsored by Wisconsin Aluminum Foundry
- Valders High School sponsored by Spancrete
- Lincoln High School Team 1, sponsored by Manitowoc Cranes
- Lincoln High School Team 2, sponsored by LDI

The project committee is comprised of the following Manitowoc County professionals who have devoted countless hours to the project to date:

Ellen Bartling, Principal, Valders High School

Kory Brockman and Steve Vaness, Wisconsin Aluminum Foundry

Rick Conrad and Kari Krull, MPSD

Sandy Destree, WI Department of Workforce Development

Jill Hennessey (chair), The Manitowoc Company

Ken Stubbe and Tracy Benter, Economic Development Corp of Manitowoc County

Karen Szyman, The Chamber of Manitowoc County

Karla Zahn, LTC

We invite you to follow the progress of this year's teams, and look forward to continuing the project for years to come!

Jill Hennessey and Karen Szyman
Project Steering Committee members