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Resurrection of an industry – manufacturing

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Bruce Hagenau

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While many in the popular press declared the end of manufacturing in this country years ago, manufacturing is once again a growing and vital part of our national and regional economy. According to the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), since the end of the recession in 2009, manufacturing output has increased 18 percent. Manufacturers contributed a record \$2 trillion to our economy. The manufacturing sector is larger than the entire economies of all but seven countries, and manufacturing exports have reached an all-time high. Manufacturing is no longer a declining sector of our economy but one that is growing.

The idea of manufacturing that most of us grew up with is dead and gone. The old, tired reputation of smokestacks and soot-covered worker faces still lives on.

Unfortunately, that is holding us back from taking even greater advantage of some important economic opportunities. Today, manufacturing is driven by innovation. The newest manufacturing jobs today require innovative minds and problem-solvers. The skill set of manufacturing now requires a worldwide point of view and the ability to at minimum understand other languages and cultures. Unfortunately, many in our workforce are not equipped for these jobs. NAM reports that 82 percent of manufacturers have jobs going unfilled because they can't find people due to this skills gap.

Manufacturers in our community are taking the skills gap head-on. The Manufacturing Society of Forsyth County is working closely with our school system to support the creation of new and



Bruce Hagenau is president of Metcam and the Manufacturing Society of Forsyth County.

innovative approaches to give students real-world manufacturing experiences both inside and outside of the classroom. Students can learn firsthand about the broad diversity of job opportunities available to them, and grow into the innovative problem-solvers that will drive this industry in the future.

Forsyth County Schools, the University of North Georgia and Lanier Technical College have a renewed focus on STEM education – science, technology, engineering and math. Well-prepared students have a promising and lucrative future at global firms like Hangrohe, Siemens, Motovario and Trox. More importantly, to keep the region and the nation as global leaders in manufacturing, students will not only need STEM skills but also the knowledge of how to apply those skills in strategic ways to remain competitive. Underscoring those technical skills is a dedication to creating an atmosphere that encourages teamwork, critical thinking and learning from failures.

Forsyth County has a vibrant and diverse community of small- to medium-sized manufacturing firms. The term “community” is an accurate description of how many of these firms collaborate to support one another to innovate efficient processes and develop new talent. The Manufacturing Society of Forsyth County, a division of the Cumming-Forsyth County Chamber of Commerce, provides an important forum for collaboration, advocacy and education.

Bruce Hagenau is president of Metcam and the Manufacturing Society of Forsyth County.

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