

# “Creative” Workforce Development Initiatives discussed at Manufacturing & Logistics Roundtable



[Local News](#)

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By [Eric Schwartzberg](#), Staff Writer

Workforce development is becoming an increasingly difficult task for employers, and a number of different channels are being explored to help address that challenge.

That's why local governments, cities, education officials, chambers of commerce and community foundations are partnering to develop creative workforce development solutions.

Butler Tech Superintendent/CEO Jon Graft is helping to lead an "education revolution" and has implemented many new initiatives in his three years at Butler Tech, including the new "5th Day Experience," according to Alex Kraemer, economic development manager for the city of Fairfield.

That plan includes high school students spending 14 consecutive Fridays out working in local companies starting in February 2020, Kraemer said.

"You get that real life experience instead of being in the classroom," he said. "You're out in the workforce and getting that good experience in the workplace."

The plan also gives an employer the opportunity to "try it before you buy it," according to Linda Yarger, the president of Fairfield Community Foundation.

Ohio Sen. Bill Coley, R-Liberty Twp., has sponsored legislation that would require the Ohio Department of Higher Education to create a workforce-education partnership program at public universities and colleges across Ohio.

Inspired by AK Steel officials recounting their largely unsuccessful efforts a few years ago to recruit recent graduates from Middletown High School, Coley said the anecdote was eye-opening for the need for better coordination between schools and private industry.

The proposed work and school cooperative programs would allow students to attend at Miami University Hamilton's campus and also work part-time for area employers needing workers.

One of the new program's goals is to allow students to earn two- and four-year degrees with less college loan debt.

"The hook is having your tuition paid for," Yarger said "I think that's really important and that will bring in potential students that might not otherwise be able to go to school and therefore not be in a position to work in different industries."

It also helps the bill proposes providing free-of-charge housing by Miami University, Kraemer said. "That's a neat, added bonus," he said. "What a great incentive."

Kert Radel, president and CEO of the Fairfield Chamber of Commerce, said he consistently hears from businesses that are looking for "qualified employees, not just bodies."

"Oftentimes, you're not just going to keep them very long, and so if they can have an invested interest in a possible future employee, they have a higher chance of being able to retain that employee," Radel said. " They're willing to make an investment for that because it's impeding them, in a lot of cases, being able to make more money, more profits for their company because they don't have enough employees to do the job."

Also leading the workforce development effort is Thyssenkrupp Bilstein, a company with a Hamilton presence that in a decade has tripled the size of its facility and quadrupled its workforce to 800 employees, largely due to widespread innovation and creativity with its workforce, Kraemer said.

The company commits its employees to increased transparency and cross-training while minimizing the amount of "dull, repetitive" tasks, he said.

Creative workforce development will be the focus of a Manufacturing & Logistics Roundtable Discussion, a free event from 7:30 a.m. to 9 a.m. today at Phalen Center South Trace Clubhouse/Fairfield Greens Golf Course, 2200 John Gray Road, Fairfield.

Headed by the chamber in collaboration with the City of Fairfield, Fairfield Community Foundation, and OhioMeansJobs-Butler County, the event will be the third such quarterly roundtable event. The initial offering in November focused on Medical Marijuana in the Workplace. A February roundtable featured discussion on PACE Financing.

Melissa O'Brien, business services manager for OhioMeansJobs-Butler County, said that in today's highly competitive employee market, it is imperative that businesses implement good hiring, training, innovation, and creativity in workforce development.

"This roundtable discussion gives employers the opportunity to come together and talk about the needs in their workforce," O'Brien said. "Instead of reinventing the wheel, let's work together and find out what's working for this company and that company and let's make our community a better and more vibrant place to live and work."

## **IF YOU GO**

**WHAT:** Manufacturing & Logistics Roundtable Discussion Series

**TOPIC:** Creative Workforce Development: Innovative ways of attracting, training and retaining workforce in today's environment.

**WHEN:** today with networking and breakfast starting at 7:30 and the program from 8 to 9 a.m.

**WHERE:** Phalen Center South Trace Clubhouse/Fairfield Greens Golf Course, 2200 John Gray Road, Fairfield

**PANEL INCLUDES:** Ohio Sen. Bill Coley, R-Liberty Twp.; Butler Tech Superintendent/CEO Jon Graft; Thyssenkrupp Bilstein of America human resources representative.

**COST:** Free

**WHO'S BEHIND IT:** Fairfield Chamber of Commerce, City of Fairfield, Fairfield Community Foundation, Ohio Means Jobs-Butler County

**MORE INFO:** 513-881-5500 or [president@fairfieldchamber.com](mailto:president@fairfieldchamber.com)