

2022 GRCA Manufacturing Summit Recap

Greater Reading Chamber Alliance (GRCA) held its 2022 Manufacturing Summit on October 26 at Miller Center for the Arts at Reading Area Community College (RACC). The half-day agenda included a Keynote speaker, an expert panel, and a workshop with key takeaway items.

Following opening remarks from RACC President Dr. Susan Looney, GRCA President & CEO Jim Gerlach, and Berks County Commissioner, Christian Leinbach, the event's Keynote Address, "Manufacturing in the Metaverse," was presented by Timothy Simpson, Ph.D., Paul Morrow Professor of Engineering Design & Manufacturing Co-Director, Penn State CIMP-3D, Penn State University.

Simpson told the audience that technological advances only continue to accelerate, making it all the more challenging to keep up and stop on top of everything. He said that, in manufacturing, many argue that we are now in the 4th industrial revolution, or Industry 4.0, as a consequence of advances in autonomy, artificial intelligence and machine learning (AI/ML), the internet of things (IoT), augmented and virtual reality (AR/VR), cloud and edge computing, digital twins, etc. Yet most companies are struggling to understand what this means for their business, he said.



Summit attendees networking in the lobby prior to the event.



Keynote Speaker Timothy Simpson introducing his "digital twin."

After introducing his "digital twin," Simpson explained that consulting companies are pushing blockchain and their version of the future while telecoms are pushing 5G and other advanced wireless connectivity. Bitcoin and NFTs are taking the internet by storm, and everyone seems to be talking about the metaverse now too, he said, be it Meta's (née Facebook's) version or some other immersive online digital environment a la the Matrix or Ready Player One's Oasis. Using additive manufacturing — applying 3-D Printing to "make things out of data" — as an example of the digital transformation that is occurring, Simpson offered his view on how these advances create synergies that will transform manufacturing, production, and supply chains as we know them. As a result, he demonstrated how digitalization will define the 21st century similar to how industrialization shaped the 20th century.

Simpson's address was followed by a panel discussion on "Talent and Attraction," featuring regional manufacturing professionals including Alexia Pursley, Human Resources Manager - Arkema (PANEL FACILITATOR); Heather Hillmann, Human Resources Manager - Unique Snacks; Nate Swartz ECRE, CDR, CSMR, PRC, CIR, Head of Talent Acquisition - Reading Truck; Dayana Blandon, Human Resources Manager - DAK Americas, An Alpek Polyester Business; and Scott Smith, VP-Sr. HR Consultant - Herbein I Mosteller HR Consulting. The panel shared insights and experiences on how organizational culture plays into attracting critical talent and retaining them. In this tough talent environment with low levels of unemployment and the high rates of quitting, the panel members discussed how companies can prevail with positive talent management practices and investment in their organizational culture.



Panel discussion on "Talent and Attraction."

Following the panel discussion, Nic Thomas, Development & Consulting - GAGE Personnel, presented a workshop titled, The "BIG PICTURE" of Local Wages: Analysis, Trends, & Pitfalls. Thomas explored the recent explosion of wages over the past two years, as evidenced by data. He explained that GAGE's unique perspective within the staffing industry allows them to see trends that may be used as industry or sector indicators. As we're all forced to navigate a disrupted talent market, it is imperative that we arm ourselves with the best data we have available, in order to act swiftly and accurately, he said, adding, If we do not take action, or ignore the signs, our "talent attraction" issue may quickly become our "talent retention" problem.

A second workshop, PA Playbook for Manufacturing Competitiveness, featured Karen Norheim, President & CEO - American Crane Equipment, and Dan Fogarty, COO - Berks County Workforce Development Board. This presentation provided a brief overview of the Pennsylvania Manufacturing Competitiveness Playbook, which was recently released by the PA Manufacturing Advisory Council. This report identifies three game changers and ten related recommendations to turn around Pennsylvania's economic performance in manufacturing.

Jamey Maack, US Anodize, provided closing comments. This GRCA event was sponsored by American Crane & Equipment Corporation (Platinum Sponsor); East Penn Manufacturing, Levan Machine & Truck Equipment, Reading Truck, and Pennsylvania State Employees Credit Union (Gold Sponsors); Enterprise System Partners, Inc. (Silver Sponsor) and Penn State Berks (Bronze Sponsor).