

Machine operator honored

Young workers in manufacturing get spotlight.

By Thomas Gnau
Staff Writer

DAYTON – By all accounts, Aaron Maddox is the kind of young worker manufacturers need.

Maddox, 28, a CNC (computer numeric control) machine operator for Lewark Metal Spinning Inc., was one of several area workers singled out for the inaugural Ohio treasurer's "Ohio Strong" award Tuesday.

Six workers at Springfield's Ohio Stamping & Machine – Akil Ragland, Craig Cattell, Dale Wells, Lenny Holbrook, Randy Littler and Tod Hines – also received the award.

The idea behind the honor is to highlight the need for young, skilled

workers in manufacturing or any hands-on field that doesn't require a four-year college degree.

"With a company like Lewark, there is opportunity," said Maddox, a veteran of Delphi and other area manufacturers. He has seen one layoff and a tough economy for the past few years, but the Huber Heights resident said he feels like he could retire from Lewark, where he has worked for just four months.

Pete Hagenbuch, Lewark president, held Maddox up as an example for his co-workers. "He is of the utmost integrity."

Josh Mandel, Ohio treasurer, lamented the shortage of skilled young workers seeking manufacturing job openings. He pointed to "liberal arts" graduates who are "serving coffee at Starbucks or working retail at the mall."

"This is for the workers who have the tools in their toolbelt," Mandel said.

Deb Norris, Sinclair Community College vice president, workforce development and corporate services, doesn't agree that there are necessarily too many liberal arts students and graduates. But she agreed that manufacturers should do their best to attract future workers. For years, manufacturers have wrestled with ways to replace aging workers who are nearing retirement.

And Norris likes the idea of anyone in any field, including liberal arts, updating skills and credentials and embracing lifelong education.

"It's about where the jobs are," she said.

"They (manufacturers) have struggled for some time to show that industry is alive and well," Norris said. "And also they

have struggled to say, 'It's not your father's Oldsmobile.'"

The unemployment rate for college graduates in 2013 was four percent, compared to 7.5 percent for those with a high school diploma, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. For those who haven't graduated from high school, the jobless rate was 11 percent.

Mandel said his staff "cold-called" Ohio manufacturers to invite them to nominate good young workers for the new award. The effort began Monday, with a stop at Toledo Metal Spinning Co.

Lewark, founded in 1993, offers metal spinning, producing and shaping metal products for automotive, aerospace, bakeware and other industries. About 40 workers are employed at the company's Keenan Avenue plant.