

## Legislative Report

# SMC in Action - Working for You

by Eileen Anderson

## Meeting with Representative Mike Turzai

On Tuesday, November 25, 2008, several dozen SMC member manufacturers and guests attended a meeting with Representative Mike Turzai, PA House Whip, at the Chadwick in Wexford. Accompanying Mr. Turzai were Representatives Metcalfe, Hutchinson, Marshall, Mustio, and Vulakovich from the Western Pennsylvania Republican Caucus.

The November meeting was a result of discussions that began in Harrisburg last May, when we were in Harrisburg. At that time, member manufacturers brought to Mr. Turzai's attention the difficulty they have finding qualified workers to fill numerous vacancies. A follow-up meeting was promised. In September, an ad hoc SMC committee met to prepare a Position Paper on workforce issues and proposed solutions. We then requested a formal meeting with Representative Turzai.

The first part of the November meeting included informal testimony on workforce problems shared by SMC member-companies, including proposed solutions. Members were armed with supporting facts and data from their own businesses. Jesse Wick, vice president, Pico Pascal Company, served as the facilitator. Speakers were: Jason Richards, Human Resources manager, Tri-Arc Linett Manufacturing Co., Inc.; Christine Simcic, secretary/treasurer, Wojanis Supply Company, Inc.; Mark Shelleby, treasurer, Vista Metals; Jennifer McDade, controller, Holtec Manufacturing; and, Jeff Pfeifer, president, MLP Steel.

It was grassroots lobbying at its finest. . . .small businessmen and women addressing lawmakers face-to-face. Members cited over and over their difficulty in finding skilled workers, the great expense they incur in training employees, the lack of students in available training programs, the lack of awareness of decent career paths in manufacturing, the poor coordination between training programs and employer needs, and the cumbersome application process to secure funding for training.

Proposed solutions included the need to coordinate training programs with the needs of

manufacturers, the need to get the message out about decent jobs being available, and the need to erase the stigma associated with jobs in manufacturing and attending trade schools. SMC members suggested employer tax credits for training as a way to streamline the funding process. For a full summary of SMC Manufacturers' Workforce Issues please go to: [www.smc.org](http://www.smc.org) and click on Government Relations and then State Issues.

During the roundtable discussion period, Representative Turzai introduced two guests from the Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board, who gave a brief description of the services available to assist businesses in locating and training workers. Mr. Turzai clearly understood members' issues but wanted to make sure that they were familiar with and were using these services to their fullest extent before proposing new solutions.

SMC members brought additional issues and many good ideas to the table. Mel Solomon, Tri-Arc Linett Manufacturing Co., Inc., said that for every 200 candidates interviewed, six may be hired and another 20 may be trainable. In response, Turzai suggested we work with community colleges to structure programs to meet the needs of individual manufacturers and offer loan forgiveness for employees' tuition in exchange for several years of employment.

Representative Scott Hutchinson said it might be possible to work with state schools, have them function like community colleges and offer two-year degrees in manufacturing-related programs. Jeff Kelly, Hamill Manufacturing, stated that reform of the structure and funding of high school career technical centers is needed. Representative Turzai agreed.

The meeting was very successful. SMC members brought their issues to the table and lawmakers listened. Representative Turzai said the next step would be a meeting with SMC members, lawmakers, and different partners in the educational process to determine how all can work together. Representative Jim Marshall volunteered to host the event at the Beaver County Community College. The complaining is over and we do not want to reinvent the wheel. Let's take action to solve our workforce problems by drawing on the broad base of knowledge of those who have been down this path ahead of us.

## Health Care Community Discussion

President-Elect Obama believes that every American should have high quality and affordable health care. In order to reach this goal, he believes we must modernize our health care system to: improve health care quality and cut costs; expand coverage and access; and, increase the emphasis on primary care and prevention. The Obama-Biden Transition Project invited community groups across the United States to gather together to discuss these issues and provide a videotape and transcript of the session to the new administration's health care team.



On December 19, 2008, SMC members joined with other small business owners at Duquesne University to share experiences and recommend solutions to resolve the problem of rising health care costs. Dr. Mary McKinney, director, Duquesne University Small Business Development Center, acted as facilitator. Participating SMC members were: Eileen Anderson, Red Clay Tile Works; Patty Brunner, Command Systems, Inc.; Vincent Finizio, Architect; Linda Froehlich, Ace Wire Spring & Form Co.; Elaine Jewart, Jewart's Gymnastics; Charlotte Kaltenbaugh, Sabika Austrian Crystal Jewelry; Laura Magone, Organizational Development Consultant; Abu Noaman, Elliance; Anna Peter, Scalise Industries; Charles Wozniak, Creekside Springs; and, SMC President Lee Taddonio.

The tape has been forwarded to the Obama-Biden Transition team. Stay tuned! ▼

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