

Career Street brings kids, jobs together

By **ERICA ERWIN**
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School districts want to find internships and prospective jobs for their students.

Local businesses are desperate for skilled workers.

Career Street is helping to bridge the gap.

The program helps students explore different careers and understand what's needed to land — and succeed in — those jobs. A community service program of the Erie County Vocational-Technical

School Foundation, Career Street also provides resources and activities to educators, businesses and others to help young people prepare for their future.

On Monday, superintendents and other administrators from a handful of school districts throughout the region traveled by trolley to tour four different companies as part of the program: Erie Press Systems, McInnes Rolled Rings, Curtze Food Service and FMC Technologies.

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Jim Snyder, plant manager at Specialty Steak Service, left, gives a tour to members of Career Street at the business on Monday.

Tour: Career Street bridges divide

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The aim: learn about the companies and their products and develop relationships that could ultimately reap rewards for students, the businesses and the community as a whole.

"As part of developing the workforce, educators need to be aware of what's happening locally, and leaders from the private sector need to know the challenges in education," Career Street Executive Director Jennifer Nygaard Pontzer said.

"These are two types of people who don't interact" very often, Pontzer said of district administrators and business professionals.

At Curtze, 1717 E. 12th St., officials toured the warehouse, cooler and, across the street, Specialty Steak Service, an affiliated business. Christopher Holmberg, director of human resources, highlighted the wide variety of



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jobs available to students: delivery driver, skilled meat cutter, maintenance worker and even graphic designer. Curtze designs all of its promotional pieces and menus in-house.

"We're trying to connect (students) with their passions, their skills, their interests," said Marcy Nystrom of the human resources department.

Harbor Creek schools

Superintendent Patricia Hawley said the district is surveying students to find out their interests, and working to provide opportunities that meet those interests. The district is starting career exploration early, in seventh and eighth grades, she said.

"By the time they get in ninth grade, they're already in courses that have a career path," Hawley

said. Students might not know about all the different options available, she said.

Several administrators said they want to connect the skills that employers need with what their students are learning.

"Our biggest problem is that everyone is finger pointing. Schools aren't doing enough. Manufacturers aren't doing enough.

From left, Jennifer Nygaard Pontzer, executive director of Career Street; Mat Pundt; and Patricia Hawley are given a tour of the warehouse at Curtze Food Service in Erie by Christopher Holmberg, right. Holmberg is the director of human resources at Curtze Food Service.

Career Street is bringing everyone together and starting a common dialogue," Iroquois schools Superintendent Shane Murray said.

At FMC Technologies, Jim Ertl, vice president and general manager of the measurement products unit, told the group that the company can't find enough qualified machinists, welders, fabricators and assemblers. That's led the company to expand an existing internship program with Penn State Behrend and develop a new apprenticeship program with the Erie School District.

Ultimately, businesses and the community benefit.

"We're looking for opportunities to take our skilled students into the workforce to become long-term employees," said Mat Pundt, the district's director of vocational and technical education.

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