

Jim Piper

President

Matot

For programs like Manufacturing Renaissance (MR) to succeed, they need active partners who are willing to both teach and hire new graduates. Jim Piper is one of those partners. As president of Matot, a company that manufactures custom-engineered dumbwaiters in Bellwood, Illinois, Piper and MR have such a deep relationship that many students see the inside of his company even before they work there.

“We offer tours to high school students throughout the year,” said Piper. “Our doors are always open to having DeeDee Jones (Industry Coordinator) and her crew bring 20-25 kids through for a couple hours where we can just talk to them about the type of work we do.” When people drive by Matot, all they see is a nondescript building with no clue as to what goes on inside. When he invites youth in for tours, they get to see manufacturing in action.

“They can see sheet metal get transformed right before their eyes, working across our shop floor to a finished product that’s going to get shipped out the door,” said Piper. “We have fun equipment: we cut steel, we bend steel, and we weld steel. That catches their attention, and leads them to ask good questions like, *how’s that work? what’s that doing?* For me, it’s when they ask the questions like, *hey, what’s that guy making an hour?*” While Piper never divulges wage information, it is that last question that lets him know how interested the youth are in manufacturing. Normally, he responds by describing the type of lifestyle the workers can afford on a manufacturing salary that gives them the means to take care of their family and buy a home. That alone is enough to sway the students. “It’s nice to have those discussions with the youth,” said Piper. “So we’re always welcoming them back.”

Matot goes even further by hiring students for 12- to 16-week summer internships, and by participating in MR’s two-week job

shadowing program. “We’ll have students come for a couple of days, and just sit beside several different types of functions in our company. And that can be with engineering, accounting, customer service sales, and then on the shop floor as well, just to get different experiences within the company,” explained Piper.

Giving students access to opportunities is the key to exposing them to the many facets of a manufacturing company. That is how Piper has managed to hire so many students who go on to become effective workers. Although Matot is a family-owned business, with many veteran employees who have worked there for decades, it is the younger employees who make a difference to the observant students. “When we give our tours, we make sure to introduce them particularly to those younger employees,” Piper described. “*Hey, see this guy, or this young lady? In five years or eight years from now, that could be you.* It’s very relatable.”

Not only does Piper appreciate the work that MR does in preparing students for the workforce, he also could not set up new employees for success without MR teaching him and his employees how to relate to the youth. “They provide us with perspective as to where the



kids are coming from,” Piper explained. “Things like their familial and social situations. Yes, we know, these kids are primarily coming from the West Side and South Side of Chicago. But what does that mean? What are their impressions of manufacturing?” This information helps Piper figure out how to talk to new employees and how his company’s culture can nurture them so that they not only become skilled workers, but feel like a part of the Matot family.

For students who see manufacturing as a path to entrepreneurship, Piper believes that his company’s method of giving interns and new hires a taste of everything is beneficial to their growth. The exposure alone is enough to give them ideas as to what is possible. Highly-engineered and locally-manufactured products such as dumbwaiters can inspire the entrepreneurial interests of students.

“So all of those little touches can be helpful for kids. Whether they’re going to make an app, a delivery service, a commercially available product, or whatever it is, understanding some of the intricacies of how a business gets run is going to help them.”