



Manufacturing Up Close: Students build product during 'Made in Vermont' days at Mack

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Over 90 students and staff from three area high schools attended Mack Molding's 'Made in Vermont' days this week at its headquarters plant. All were upperclassmen at Burr & Burton Academy (Manchester), Arlington Memorial High School, and the Career Development Center (Bennington).

Students toured the f'real frozen beverage blender line, where virtually all of Mack's services come together to build the very complex product, including plastics, sheet metal, machining and total product manufacturing, as well as the procurement of over 400 unique parts from 63 suppliers and distribution of the final product. In addition to standing up to the rigors of the blend-it-yourself retail scene, the 'smart' appliance automatically self-cleans and steam sanitizes, and alerts f'real if there is ever a blender malfunction in the field.

After seeing the way it's done in the real world of modern manufacturing, the students were put to the test of building a simulated product themselves. Directed by the Vermont Manufacturing Extension Center (VMEC), the exercise pitted teams in a race against time to see who could manufacture the most product, with high quality, in a given period of time. The common response after the dust settled? "It's a lot harder than it looks!"

A discussion regarding the skills needed in modern manufacturing and relative career paths at Mack wrapped up the day, followed by pizza and f'real shakes.

Over a third of the students signed up for the opportunity to have more exposure in specific areas. "We'll follow up with each of the schools to put together meaningful programs for these students, such as job-shadowing, small group seminars, or one-on-one mentoring programs," commits Jeff Somple, president, Mack Molding Northern Operations. "Like the state, we value our youth, and want them to have the choice to stay here. They represent the future, not only for Mack, but for all businesses in the state.

"Recent studies have confirmed what we've already been seeing – manufacturing is returning from China to the US," adds Somple. "China is no longer the low-cost wage center it once was, which means employment in US manufacturing will be on the rise. We must have an educated and well-prepared employee base from which to hire – our 'Made in Vermont' days represent just one of the ways we're trying to assist with that effort."

Mack Molding is a leading custom plastics molder and supplier of contract manufacturing services. Mack specializes in plastics design, prototyping, molding, sheet metal fabrication, full-service machining and medical device manufacturing. Founded in 1920, Mack is a privately owned business that operates 11 facilities throughout the world. Don Kendall is president and CEO.



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