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Editor's Note: Media is invited to the individual student tours. Please contact Cindy Anderson, [cindy@nwfmc.org](mailto:cindy@nwfmc.org) for specific times and locations if you desire to attend.

## **Manufacturers across Northwest Florida are opening their doors to over 600 students for National Manufacturing Month.**

In honor of National Manufacturing Month (October), the Northwest Florida Manufacturers Council is coordinating student tours to foster interest in high skill, high wage careers in advanced manufacturing. Manufacturing Month will be celebrated throughout the region by setting up tours of local manufacturing facilities for middle and high school students, as well as technical center and college students currently in manufacturing related programs. Proclamations will be offered by counties throughout the region and all four of the regional CareerSource partners are hosting Manufacturing Career Fairs in efforts to bring awareness of the positive impact of manufacturing to our economy. According to Greg Britton, CEO of Ft. Walton Machining and Chair of the Northwest Florida Manufacturers Council, "The lack of public knowledge about manufacturing in the United States and, particularly here in Northwest Florida, is having a significant negative impact on our local manufacturing economy. Manufacturing in 2015 is not my grandfather's manufacturing. Today's manufacturers require skill sets that, in the past, had not been offered in our educational institutions. The good news is we are now seeing programs offered, but, students and parents simply aren't aware of the incredible job opportunities that manufacturing has to offer. Our goal is to change that perception to protect one of our fastest growing industries."

A top priority of the Northwest Florida Manufacturers Council is to deepen the manufacturing talent pool and fill the gap of skilled technicians that are needed in our area. According to the National Association of Manufacturers, 67 percent of manufacturing companies reported a moderate to severe shortage of available qualified workers. "We want to expose students to the real world of modern manufacturing," said Stan Connally, President & CEO Gulf Power and Vice-Chair of the Northwest Florida Manufacturers Council. "By hosting events like these, we can begin to address the misperceptions about manufacturing careers by giving local manufacturers a chance to educate students on today's industry and showcase the careers available if they receive the proper education and training. To this end, the NWFMFC has worked with all ten Northwest Florida county school districts to open middle and high school manufacturing academies, with a current enrollment of over 700 students.."

Over 20 schools and 17 manufacturing facilities will be participating in tours this year. Northwest Florida manufacturers hosting tours include Gulf Power Company Plant Crist, Ascend Performance Materials, International Paper, Eastman, General Electric, Maritech, MERRICK Industries, Bay State Cable Ties, Manown Engineering, ExxonMobil, Cerex, OREN International, Rex-Lumber, West Point Home, Enviva Pellets and Fort Walton Machining. Students will be provided with information about manufacturing in Florida before they go on the tours.

Today's manufacturing environments include highly trained, well-paid employees who work on state-of-the-art equipment. This past year, the average wage for manufacturing workers in Northwest Florida (ten county region) exceeded \$67,000 annually. In Northwest Florida, the manufacturing industry provides in excess of 16,000 jobs and generates an estimated \$1,123,521,992 in wages.

"The goal of these tours will be to open the eyes of the students to the possibility of a career in manufacturing right here in Northwest Florida," said Britton.

For more information about National Manufacturers Month, visit [www.mfgday.com](http://www.mfgday.com) or contact Cindy Anderson at 850-791-0164. For more information on the Northwest Florida Manufacturers Council, whose mission is to strengthen the economic competitiveness of the region's manufacturers by acting as a single voice to address common interests, please visit [www.nwfmc.org](http://www.nwfmc.org).

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