

JEFFERSON'S JOURNEY

Partnerships Ignite Madison's Potential

By Symone C. Skrzycki

Breathtaking views, popular festivals and artistic downtown attractions define Madison's culture.

Dalton Roark always dreamed of working at SuperATV. Specializing in all-terrain and utility vehicle parts and accessories, it's headquartered across the street from Madison Consolidated High School (MCHS).

He fondly recalls that as a student, "I would look out the window and tell (industrial arts instructor) Ryan Lamb, 'I'm going to work there some day.' "

After graduating in December, Roark – who has grown up around cars and racing – turned his aspiration into a reality by joining SuperATV in its assembly area. Today, he heads up the windshield division.

Roark is the first alum of Cub Manufacturing – a student-run business based out of MCHS. Open to juniors and seniors, it's a partnership with Ivy Tech Community College-Southeast and area businesses representing 2,000-plus employees in Jefferson County.

Cub Manufacturing kicked off in August 2015 with 10 students. That number is expected to reach 15 during the 2016-2017 school year, with continued growth planned. Participants explore production (including hands-on training using welding and fabrication equipment), accounting, marketing, purchasing, hiring and soft skills (problem solving, teamwork, supervision).

"All of these tools can be used in the dozen or so industries we have here in town," remarks Dave Ungru, president of Koehler Welding Supply. "That's one thing we're

very blessed with. Hopefully we can fast-track these kids and get them right on into employment as soon as they graduate."

SuperATV is covering Roark's tuition at Ivy Tech, where he's pursuing a technical certification in industrial technology with a welding concentration.

"This is our pilot program," declares Katie Mote, president of Ivy Tech's Madison campus. "It's great for (Roark) to have both that great employment opportunity and an incentive to remain in our community and continue to contribute to the quality of life. The experience this student is having is the vision we're working to implement for all students that would go into this program."

That's not the only thing firing people up in Jefferson County.

Madison may be small (population: approximately 12,000), but it's a powerful contender and one of eight finalists in the America's Best Communities (ABC) competition. Grand prize winners (who will receive \$3 million, \$2 million or \$1 million, respectively) will be announced in April 2017.

In addition, community members are shaping the future via the ENVISION Jefferson County action plan.

Tools of the trade

Roark earned his first American Welding Society certification (three comprise the credential he's seeking) in May.

"I feel very accomplished," he expresses. "My dad is a welder and a fabricator for a living. My parents were so proud."

Nathan Hadley, college and career readiness coordinator for the local school district, notes, "It's a nice success story because based on his work in the business, even though it was just one semester, he was able to get employment at a local manufacturing business. That's really the idea – is that it becomes a pipeline for employment for our local industry."

Madison Precision Products (MPP) set up shop nearly 30 years ago. Boasting 650 employees, it makes aluminum die cast automotive products.

When asked to share his thoughts about



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– Katie Mote, president
Ivy Tech, Madison campus

the area’s workforce challenges, vice president Kevin Turner pauses before suggesting: “There are two sides to this question.”

Misconceptions about manufacturing are one challenge.

“A lot of changes have occurred in manufacturing over the last few decades, and manufacturing has allowed itself to lose some of its appeal to younger people. What we’re finding is that young people in high school don’t have a good idea of what opportunities and different jobs are available.”

An innovative endeavor illustrates one of those career paths: advanced automation and robotics. Three apprentices from Ivy Tech spend a maximum of 16 hours per week at MPP, which pays tuition and book fees.

“We pay them an hourly wage to go to class,” Turner comments. “Once they complete the program (in approximately two years), we offer them a job that pays about \$46,000 per year. It’s a pretty sweet deal.”

Retiring Baby Boomers (estimates approach 50% of the manufacturing employees) will shrink Jefferson County’s workforce in the coming years. Turner’s take?

“For any company, if you’re planning on being around for the long term, you have to take an interest in, ‘Where’s your next generation going to come from?’ he asserts. “Our community has many assets in terms of the historic downtown area, the state park,

the access to the river. We have good amenities, but we haven’t identified or quite hit on those amenities that young people strive to have in their community.”

‘Envision’ing change

Launched in 2014, ENVISION emphasizes engagement. It grew out of a variety of public forums.

“It was all walks of life,” reflects Ungru, who serves as chair of the Jefferson County Industrial Development Corporation. “We wanted the young. We wanted the old. We wanted the people in poverty and the ones who were better off. We wanted everybody’s input.”

The initiative revolves around six areas:

- Promoting health, safety and well-being
- Building a positive community through collaboration and leadership
- Creating quality education
- Advancing personal prosperity and community economic vitality
- Creating attractive, productive and desirable places
- Shaping a vibrant community through entertainment and arts

“They’re recognizing the great work that’s going on in the community,” stresses Valecia Crisafulli, who is coordinating implementation. “For the most part, you’re not going to see anything that wasn’t already happening here to some degree. It’s more,



The Cub Manufacturing program at Madison Consolidated High School emphasizes hands-on training while teaching students how to run a business.

‘How are we going to move this forward? How are we going to really push this to where it needs to be?’ ”

Mighty Madison

And then there were eight.

In 2014, Madison received \$50,000 to develop a community revitalization plan as one of 50 quarterfinalists in the ABC program. After it soared to the top 15, city officials traveled to North Carolina in April 2016 to pitch Madison’s proposal at the ABC Summit (Valparaiso and Angola/Fremont also were semifinalists, but did not advance further in the competition).

“We walked away as one of eight finalists (each received \$100,000 to implement their plans). Essentially, from here they’re going to evaluate how well our community – as well as the other communities – is able to achieve the goals we set forth and create long-term change,” explains Andrew Forrester, community relations director for the city.

Madison’s revitalization plan highlights many facets, such as connectivity and place making. At its core is the Madison Connector, a six-mile loop multi-use trail that would link the hilltop (commercial district) and downtown areas.

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“Our plans are to open an abandoned road that goes through our downtown and our hilltop for pedestrian and bicycle use, and also work to revitalize one of our main corridors downtown from that hill to the (Ohio) River,” Forrester imparts.

Objectives also include encouraging healthy lifestyle improvements in the community through the 30 Million Steps in 30 Days fitness challenge, which took place in June, and growing the number of bike to work days.

Mayor Damon Welch asserts that judges weren’t seeking the perfect community.

“They were looking for communities that were special and did have a lot of special things going on,” he proudly remarks. “But they also (desired those) that were looking forward at not only where their assets were, but maybe some of the weaknesses they could work on, too, in moving forward.”

Forrester is savoring every step.

“This has been an awesome opportunity,” he declares. “It’s given our community something to rally around. We’ve



A combined 400-plus citizens contributed ideas at public meetings that led to the development of the ENVISION Jefferson County action plan.

had some people say, ‘We’ve got problems. We’ve got a drug problem. We’ve got issues with jobs. We’ve got issues with this and that.’ And my response is always, ‘Find a place that doesn’t have that.’

“We don’t want to ignore those things.

They’re issues our community is going to address, but we feel like this is giving us the pride and energy to take on those issues as well as many others, and we’re going to be even better for it.”

RESOURCES: Mayor Damon Welch and Andrew Forrester, city of Madison, at www.madison-in.gov | Katie Mote, Ivy Tech Community College-Southeast, at www.ivytech.edu/southeast | Dave Ungru, Koehler Welding Supply, at www.koehlerweld.com | Nathan Hadley, Madison Consolidated High School, at www.madison.k12.in.us | Kevin Turner, Madison Precision Products, at www.madisonprecision.com | Dalton Roark, SuperATV, at www.superatv.com | Valerie Crisafulli, Envision Jefferson County, at www.envisionjeffersoncounty.org



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