

Patti Beck, Bi-State Development
Senior Director of Media & Public Relations
314-982-1524 (O) 314-486-9091 (C)

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REGIONAL COLLABORATIONS HELP GROW LOGISTICS AND MANUFACTURING WORKFORCE

[ST. LOUIS, MO/May 17, 2024] Regional collaborations are helping fill in-demand positions while creating workforce opportunities in logistics and manufacturing in the St. Louis region. These efforts and opportunities were the focus of a panel discussion featured as part of FreightWeekSTL 2024. Panelists included Tony Ray, Vice President and General Manager St. Louis Completions, **Gulfstream Aerospace Corp.**; Jill Bracy, Ph.D., Associate Teaching Professor in the Department of Supply Chain & Analytics at the **University of Missouri-St. Louis** and Acting Director of the Supply Chain Risk & Resilience Research Institute; Tom McGovern, Dean of STEM, **St. Louis Community College-Florissant Valley Campus**; Tony Fuhrmann, Director of Employment and Training, **Madison County**; and Brian Mentzer, Ed.D., Superintendent, **Belleville Township High School District 201**.

Ray discussed how **Gulfstream** collaborates with local educational institutions to help attract young adults to the aerospace industry. The company, which has locations across the globe, has operated a maintenance repair and overall (MRO) facility out of St. Louis Downtown Airport since 2017 and expanded operations in 2023 to include new aircraft outfitting and completions. Ongoing expansion of completions activities has created more job openings. Gulfstream has more than 550 employees at the St. Louis facility and continues hiring to fill a variety of roles.

The company also has a relationship with Belleville High School to support the school's Center for Academic and Vocational Excellence (CAVE). CAVE offers vocational programs that allow students to take advanced courses, graduate with college credit and be prepared to embark on their chosen career pathway immediately after high school.

"I'm extremely proud of what we're doing here at our Gulfstream St. Louis site to introduce Gulfstream to the community and support the aviation industry in the greater St. Louis area," said Ray. "The St. Louis region is a great place to build our local workforce. We've already seen high interest at our multiple hiring events over the last six to nine months."

Mentzer spoke more about the CAVE facility and program, which is working with more than 70 industry partners to provide career training opportunities for students at **Belleville Township High School District 201**.

A new advanced aviation program will be launched next school year at the CAVE and will be housed in a 15,000-square-foot facility that is currently under construction. The program will connect students with a variety of aviation careers, including pre-pilot training, airport management and career-based trades programs affiliated with aviation.

"We're working to develop partnerships with companies that will transition our students into employment post-graduation," said Mentzer. "In our community, when we look at just a radius around our school system, there's been significant growth in recent years in manufacturing, aviation and logistics, and we've been able to capitalize on those opportunities. We've forged a pretty strong partnership with our friends at Gulfstream and other industry partners that translates to our students receiving excellent training and opportunities for employment after high school."

Similar partnerships are being forged between companies and local colleges. McGovern, who oversees **St. Louis Community College's (STLCC)** manufacturing program and will soon oversee the school's automotive and diesel transportation programs, spoke about the school's Boeing pre-employment program. Students participating in the

program complete a course in sheet metal assembly or composites and are guaranteed an interview with Boeing after they complete the program. The program will be housed in an approximately 100,000-square-foot advanced manufacturing center that is being built on STLCC's Florissant Valley campus, combines STLCC's workforce and credit programs and is scheduled to open in Spring 2025. Precision machining, which is a 16-week program that enables students to become certified and go straight to work, is also housed in the center, as is electronics, biomedical electronic repair, and more traditional industrial skills programs like welding and HVAC. Additionally, at STLCC - Forest Park, a transportation education center featuring a full auto, diesel, and truck driving facility, is being added. The programs will teach students the professional skills needed to be a certified truck driver or mechanic.

STLCC also partners with high schools to enable seniors to earn a certificate or college credit while in high school. McGovern said a great example of that is its drone program with the Hazelwood, Missouri, school district where students get dual credit for their course and can take the FAA 107 commercial remote pilot exam.

"Manufacturing and logistics are two areas with lots of opportunity, and we just don't have a big pipeline of skilled workers coming in yet," said McGovern. He added that while companies are interviewing candidates who may not have the skills needed, the educational institutions in the St. Louis region all have programs that can help these candidates obtain these skills within six months to a year. "That kind of relationship between industry and education is so powerful because it brings the real-life applications into the classroom and students really can see what it is they are going to be able to do. That ends up being the best recruiting we can do."

The University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL) is also actively working to connect skilled workers with employers in the supply chain and logistics fields. Bracy teaches courses in quantitative methods and supply chain strategy at the undergraduate and graduate levels and supports UMSL's outreach initiatives. She spoke more about these initiatives that include engaging with current and prospective students along with alumni, fostering relationships between industry partners and associations, and building private academic and public partnerships.

One initiative she touched on is a partnership with the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to encourage middle schoolers and high schoolers to pursue careers in the supply chain industry, by first teaching middle school and high school staff and administrators about the opportunities that exist. The program is called Pathways to Success. Educators, counselors and administrators are taken to facilities around the region – like America's Central Port, Terminal Railroad Association and warehouse facilities along the riverfront – to see firsthand the different career paths that exist for high school students, whether they are interested in pursuing higher education or are interested in going straight into the workforce after graduation. Bracy added the initiative has allowed UMSL to go into the high schools to talk to the students about career opportunities, bring the students to UMSL and take them out into industry, really showcasing that there are some exciting, wonderful, rewarding career paths here in the St. Louis region.

Bracy's department is also working closely with community colleges and other universities in the region to encourage students to pursue a career in the supply chain industry and come to St. Louis. It is also working closely with industry partners to make sure that what UMSL is teaching matters. "As Tom said, there are more opportunities than workforce available to fill these positions for our industry," said Bracy. "We are charged with increasing the talent pool. Working together with other academic institutions and industry partners makes us stronger."

Fuhrmann spoke about his role administering Workforce Innovation Opportunity ACT (WIOA) funds for Madison, Bond, Jersey and Calhoun Counties in Illinois. The funds come from the U.S. Department of Labor, and similar programs are offered throughout the St. Louis region and United States. The WIOA funds administered by **Madison County** are used to help both employers and individuals. Fuhrmann said, for businesses struggling to fill jobs, Madison County will share job openings through its network and will also reimburse businesses 50% of new employee wages for six months, if employees fit into one of the WIOA eligibility programs. Individuals eligible are typically either unemployed or lower income and may require on-the-job training to succeed in the workforce.

Fuhrmann talked about the resources Madison County offers for job seekers. Outside of providing job training funds for individuals that are lower income or dislocated, Madison County offers funds to cover up to \$20,000 of college tuition for young adults. Career specialists are available to help, and computers are available for job seekers to use to create their resumes, search for jobs and fill out applications online.

He also discussed a unique nationally recognized apprentice program Madison County has developed for high school students with disabilities. The program started in January 2022 through a partnership with Collinsville High School and the City of Collinsville's Gateway Convention Center and Parks and Recreation Department. Students participate in the program for one year and work at their own pace to meet several different requirements. To date, five individuals have completed the program with the City of Collinsville, and three have earned apprentice certificates in landscaping, housekeeping or as an events associate. The program has since expanded to include four more employers along with partnerships with three additional high schools.

"The apprenticeship certificates are recognized through the U.S. Department of Labor and are no different than an apprenticeship certificate earned by a craftsman going through the carpenters' union," said Fuhrmann. "We're helping individuals with disabilities that have very strong skill sets but are often overlooked find meaningful employment."

The virtual panel session was moderated by Mary Lamie. Lamie is Executive Vice President of Multimodal Enterprises for Bi-State Development, which operates the St. Louis Regional Freightway

"The career opportunities in the manufacturing and logistics sectors in the St. Louis region really are abundant," said Lamie. "It's very inspiring to see the partnerships being forged to attract high school and college students to fill in-demand positions in these growing sectors. With an additional 1,000+ jobs expected to be added over the next several years in the aerospace sector alone, these efforts are integral to our region's growth."

FreightWeekSTL 2024 was held May 13-17. The week-long freight and logistics event was delivered by the St. Louis Regional Freightway and Bi-State Development. To learn more or view past sessions, visit <https://freightweekstl.com>.

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About St. Louis Regional Freightway

A Bi-State Development enterprise, the St. Louis Regional Freightway is a regional freight district and comprehensive authority for freight operations and opportunities within eight counties in southwestern Illinois and eastern Missouri, which comprise the St. Louis metropolitan area. Public sector and private industry businesses are partnering with the St. Louis Regional Freightway to establish the bi-state region as one of the premier multimodal freight hubs and distribution centers in the United States through marketing and advocacy for infrastructure development that supports the movement of freight. To learn more, visit thefreightway.com.