



# ELMA REVIEW

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## Changing Minds About Vocations

by Adam Zaremski  
Staff Reporter

About 30 people met at Moog Inc., in Elma on Feb. 12 to discuss how to promote a future where school districts and students have more understanding about other career options beyond the college path. The group consisted of business owners and school representatives from East Aurora, Holland and Iroquois, and was organized by the Greater East Aurora Chamber of Commerce.

The meeting of educators and entrepreneurs concluded that perceptions regarding technical and skilled trade careers need to change in the minds of students and parents if those fields are ever to see a qualified increase in the workforce. It is enacting that change that will prove problematic over time, as school districts across the region are cutting back on promoting internships or trimming away at business-oriented classes, choosing to focus on programs that give students a better chance at Regents tests and getting into college as budgets are cut back.

"It's not just an educational issue, it's an economics issue," said Gary Grote, the Chamber's executive director.

Several business owners said they had some difficulty when it came to hiring people out of school or finding skilled laborers who could handle jobs like electrical work, auto mechanics and carpentry. There is an impression that the jobs are dirty and low paying, and not worth the work of learning the basics to potentially move further in the field.

"In auto repair there seems to be an image problem, and the idea of the greasy mechanic," James Bach, owner of Bach's Towing, said.

He countered that a more accurate image today is someone who is more of a technician working on computers and making good money in the process. But to get there takes training and a mindset that it is a good career path.

Others agreed with his statements. Scott Warning, owner of Warning Electric Services, said training is key in his line of work, and the lack of experience many potential employees have can be problematic. He is willing to train people to work in his field, he said, but when spring comes and work increases, it is hard to find the time to make sure someone understands the responsibilities and doesn't lose interest. He wondered if there might be more opportunities within the vocational schools to push these qualities and encourage students to seek out further education, not just college, once high school ends.

Developing a career path was another central point the group felt should be highlighted in schools, and at a much younger age. Cara Carlevatti works with a local credit union and she spoke about her difficulties as a former student and meeting with her guidance counselor. She thought school districts should place a greater focus on planning a career, especially a flexible one, throughout the years, versus meeting a few times with a counselor during junior year.

"We need to direct students," she said.

It is a difficult process for the school districts to follow, though, as budget cuts, smaller enrollments and a property tax cap can hinder this process. The extreme focus of passing Regents exams and pushing students into college is another issue that districts have a difficult time abandoning based on state evaluation standards and rankings.

"I feel bad for the school boards. They have to make tough decisions," Joanne Ryan, a business teacher at East Aurora High School, said.

The meeting had originally been called to meet with a reporter from *Buffalo Business First* to see if there was a way to adjust its yearly school rankings to include more technical and skill-oriented criteria in the ranking system. One of the people responsible for the ranking system told the chamber in an email that all the information comes from the State Education Department, and that it is "skewed" toward academic achievements versus skilled labor reports because the reports don't include such data.

"I can tell you...that there is a lack of useful data about occupational training [in the reports]," *Business First* reporter Scott Thomas wrote in the email.

During the Feb. 12 meeting, *Business First* reporter David R. Bertola spoke about his paper's goal to change the perception the other business owners talked about, and that there were many groups in the Buffalo region going through the same problems. He suggested the committee join with one of the other groups so it did not have to start at the beginning.

After the meeting, several school principals talked about the importance of moving forward on the perception change, even while dealing with cuts and lack of funds. Holland Central lost its business program last year, and the program at Iroquois Central has routinely been listed for cuts over the years, but it so far has maintained its position in the school.

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Erie County Legislator Joseph Lorigo and Elma VFW Post No. 5861 members pose with some of the valentines they received at their Feb. 6 meeting. The VFW members are distributing more cards at the Batavia VA Hospital on Valentine's Day.

## Veterans to Get Valentine's Day Cards

Local veterans will receive handmade Valentine's Day cards, thanks to students at schools located throughout Erie County's District 10. Legislator Joseph Lorigo, who represents the 10<sup>th</sup> District, visited several of the schools recently to recognize the students for participating in his second annual Valentines for Veterans program, which honors members of the military for their service.

"The Valentines for Veterans program has far exceeded my expectations thanks to the schools that participate. I am amazed by the thoughtfulness that goes into each and every card created," Lorigo said in a release. "The students have a deep appreciation for our veterans and military personnel, which is evident through their

efforts. I want to thank all the schools for taking part in Valentines for Veterans and I look forward to presenting their cards to local veteran posts and acknowledging our veterans for their service and sacrifice."

Lorigo estimated that this year's program generated more than 1,000 cards.

Six District 10 schools participated in this year's Valentines for Veterans program, including Parkdale Elementary School in East Aurora, Iroquois Elementary School and Holland's Harold O. Brumsted Elementary School.

This year's cards will be delivered to Elma VFW Post No. 5861; the Wounded Warriors Program, which sends care packages to wounded service members who are recovering in military hospitals and/or Wounded

Warrior Transition Units; and Operation Prayers & Cookies, a service provided by Town of Wales volunteers, who send packages with homemade cookies to troops in Iraq and Afghanistan every month.

"The Valentines for Veterans program is another opportunity to thank our veterans and remind them that they are appreciated year round," Lorigo said. "Last year the recipients were very appreciative of the cards, and I hope to meet with more veterans this year to personally thank them."

For additional information about Valentines for Veterans, contact Lorigo's legislative office at 858-8922 or email joseph.lorigo@erie.gov.



Photo by Holly R. Layer

A crowd gathers to watch the Sabres at Leo's Pizzeria in East Aurora, which boasts eight big-screen televisions on all four walls, during last week's NHL game against the Montreal Canadiens.

## Hockey's Return Offers Limited Benefits

by Holly R. Layer  
Freelance Reporter

While the four-month-long NHL lockout may have hurt downtown Buffalo bars and restaurants, most local estab-

lishments saw the lack of games as barely a blip on the radar.

Jeff George, dining room manager at East Aurora's Riley Street Station, said he saw a little difference in attendance, but not a lot.

"There is maybe only a 5 to 10 percent increase in business when the Sabres are playing," he said.

East End Grill & Taproom bartender Patrick Blizniak agreed.

"If they're playing on an

a "Sabretini," which is a blue-and-yellow layered martini.

Pease did say that this year's hockey season seems notably different than last year.

"I'm not sure if it's because it started halfway through or the Sabres' performance," she said. "There was no buildup."

True sports bars may have seen more change than other establishments.

Steve DiCarlo, chef at American Grille on Seneca, said his bar/restaurant offers weekly

if the Bills don't have a good season," he said.

Allison Riffel, general manager at Leo's, said the end of the lockout has brought more business.

"Food and beer have increased, and sales have also increased during the day," Riffel said. "Any place is excited—we've been waiting for hockey."

