

Toyota Panel Addresses Developing Skilled Workforce of the Future

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GEORGETOWN, Ky. (March 28, 2019) – At its Kentucky manufacturing facility today, Toyota Motor North America (TMNA) hosted a panel discussion to cast a spotlight on the challenges employers face in attracting, developing and hiring skilled technical workers now and in the future.

The eight-person panel, included TMNA Chief Executive Officer Jim Lentz, Toyota Motor Manufacturing, Kentucky President Susan Elkington, Ivanka Trump, special assistant to President Donald Trump, and Kentucky Governor Matt Bevin. The panel focused on the importance of closing the growing skills gap faced by manufacturers across multiple industries.

“To succeed in a rapidly changing industry like ours, we need to equip students with the knowledge and skills to compete in the workforce,” said Elkington “We have been forming partnerships for several years to address these future workforce needs. We recognize our success as a company relies on developing effective educational pathways for a sustainable future.”

Toyota, with 10 plants in the U.S., has been a leader on this front. In 2010, the company launched the first iteration of its Advanced Manufacturing Technician (AMT) program in partnership with local community and technical colleges. Students go to school three days and work two days, developing the skills and the training they need to transition seamlessly into full-time employment — often without student debt.

In the nine years since the program launched, elements of this model have been adopted by hundreds of other companies and schools nationwide. Toyota has also significantly expanded its program in collaboration with such organizations as Project Lead The Way, Kentucky FAME (Federation of Advanced Manufacturing Education) and The Manufacturing Institute to create a pathway that stretches from pre-kindergarten all the way to a master’s degree level.

In fact, last year, in Harrison County, Kentucky, the schools were recognized by the National Career Pathways Network for becoming the first school system to achieve a seamless STEM pathway (Pre-K through Masters).

Sara Jenkins Palmer and her sister, Marly, are two graduates of Harrison County High School and the AMT program. Both saw the benefits of a hands-on educational experience that left them with little-to- no-debt and a good job in the end. While Marly calls the pathway a “gamechanger for kids,” Sara says she’s living her dream life at age 24. “There aren’t a lot of opportunities to go to college without racking up debt. This program has allowed me a lifestyle I never thought possible.”

Trump had an opportunity to tour Toyota Motor Manufacturing Kentucky (TMMK), the company’s largest plant in the world. During her visit, Lentz signed the White House’s [“Pledge to America’s Workers,”](#) promising to invest in the advancement of the nation’s current and future workforce. Toyota pledged that over the next five years, it would create enhanced career opportunities for 200,000 individuals, through increased apprenticeships and work-based learning programs, continuing education, on-the-job training and re-skilling.