# CENTRAL UPSTATE

# **PEOPLE POWERED**

#### **EDITION 10**

A publication of MACNY, The Manufacturers Association



10 | Do You Truly Understand Your Value Proposition? Customer discovery could lead to new insights. **18 | Knock, Knock...It's Opportunity at the Door** Take up the charge for renewable energy. **30 | Resilience** Bolster yourself for times of stress or uncertainty.



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### 12

A New World for Employees and Employees are treated, and the benefits they value, impact retention.



## Inside

### 5

From the President's Desk: A welcome from MACNY's President & CEO Randy Wolken.

### 7

Expanding Apprenticeships in the Semiconductor and Nanotechnology Industries: A U.S. Department of Labor award allows for the expansion of a key program.

### 10

Do You Truly Understand Your Value Proposition: The first thing any company should do in order to grow? Listen.

14

Vision Through the Lens of Workforce Development: How MACNY is helping members address the skilled worker shortage.

### 18

Knock, Knock... It's Opportunity at the Door: The cost of doing nothing to reverse climate change may be higher than the cost of doing something.

### 26

Building a Performance Culture: Knowles Precision Devices recognizes the power of people, and has devoted itself to understanding and developing its workforce.

### 30

**Resilience:** Improve how you confront difficult situations.

### 34

Member Directory: A listing of MACNY members.

46

Index of Advertisers: A listing of our advertisers.

On the cover: A Knowles Precision Devices employee inspects a surface mount filter under a microscope. AMELIA BEAMISH



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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

## Welcome.

**THIS PAST YEAR** has been full of both challenges and opportunities. As an organization, MACNY has continued to learn and grow — and we've seen the same within the manufacturing and business communities of Central and Upstate New York. Our community has remained resilient in the face of new demands. Companies and organizations are growing again and are adapting to a new way of life and a new economy.

We're pleased to share news about investments and partnerships that will allow us to accelerate New York State Registered Apprenticeships in Advanced Manufacturing, just one avenue for addressing a workforce supply issue we've long been tackling. Read on as we also highlight how

> work environments have changed, tips for leaders to remain strong in adverse situations, how to discover what your competitive advantage really is, and ways we, as individuals and businesses, can be more intentional with our energy use.

> > Undoubtedly, the last two years have impacted attitudes, priorities, preferred styles, and flexibility around work, in addition to the supply of skilled workers. In this issue, we spotlight member company Knowles Precision Devices in Cazenovia and its commitment to building a culture of performance by educating and empowering its staff.

> > > Opportunities are often disguised as difficult situations, and we learn by overcoming. Let's continue to work together and to learn about ourselves and each other. We will only be stronger for it.

I hope you enjoy this issue as much as we have enjoyed producing it. And, as always, thank you for making Central and Upstate New York such a great place to live and work!

Randy Wolken

Randy Wolken, President & CEO

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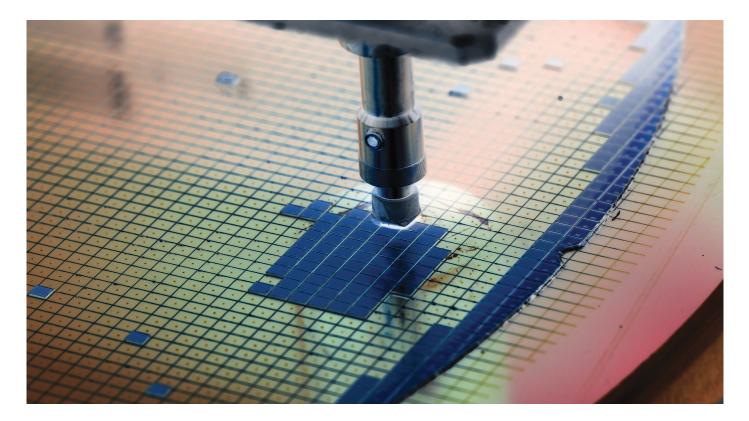
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# **Expanding Apprenticeships in the Semiconductor and Nanotechnology Industries**



BY TIFFANY LATINO-GERLOCK DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS & COMMUNICATIONS

**THE U.S. DEPARTMENT** of Labor recently awarded the National Institute for Innovation and Technology (NIIT) a contract to expand the use of Registered Apprenticeships and provide increased access for all workers to careers in strategic supply chains. Here in New York, MACNY will play an integral role in this expansion of workforce training initiatives in the semiconductor and nanotechnology industries. The investment grants approximately \$2.4 million per year

over four years, up to \$9.5 million. The funding will be used to scale the NIIT's Growing Apprenticeships in Nanotechnology and Semiconductors (GAINS) program.

The GAINS program will leverage previous investments by the National Science Foundation-Advanced Technological Education program, and will leverage the NIIT National Talent Hub, a nationally integrated infrastructure to attract, train, and connect individuals with careers in industries tied to national security and global competitiveness. In partnership with MACNY, the GAINS program will build upon the NIIT's successful Registered Apprenticeship model, which was piloted in New York state last year, and Jobs for the Future's Center for Apprenticeship & Work-Based Learning. National program partners also working with the NIIT to facilitate the GAINS program include Maher & Maher, an affiliate of the American Institutes for Research, and Credential Engine.

"The NIIT brings the industry expertise, competency-based approach and Talent Hub infrastructure needed to effectively implement Registered Apprenticeships in what has been a challenging sector to engage," says Randy Wolken, President & CEO of MACNY, The Manufacturers Association. "There is no other entity focused on the sector with the expertise and existing systems that the NIIT brings to the table, and we are looking forward to continuing to work with the Institute and other partners to help scale the GAINS program nationally."

Laury Ferguson, Director of Apprenticeship and

Workforce Development at MACNY, will oversee the program for MACNY. MACNY will continue to assist with partner development, employer outreach, and project management, serving as a subject matter expert and strengthening outreach with local, state, and national companies and organizations. MACNY is excited to be part of this significant grant and mission to support national security issues by ensuring a trained workforce is ready to start the reshoring of the semiconductor industry and companies within the nanotech sector. Over the course of the four years, we expect to support more than 3,000 apprentices, with a focus on underserved and under-represented populations.

Ferguson says, "MACNY is thrilled to serve an integral role in this important endeavor. Now more than ever, we need to focus on building the workforce of the semiconductor and nanotech sectors as it is critical to U.S. economic growth, national security, and global competitiveness. This program will do just that."

Mike Russo, President & CEO of the NIIT, says



the Institute is dedicated to such efforts. "The NIIT's mission is to ensure strategic industry sectors in the United States have what they need to prosper, innovate, and develop the talent pipeline as a top priority. Our National Talent Hub and its state-of-the-art competency-based system leverages advanced data analytics to connect jobseekers, employers, and training providers, and more efficiently target training. We look forward to strengthening our partnership with MACNY to advance Registered Apprenticeships in these strategic supply chains," says Russo.

Thanks to the pilot program, the wheels are already in motion in our area: MACNY member Indium Corporation is a premier materials refiner, smelter, manufacturer, and supplier to the global electronics, semiconductor, thin-film, and thermal management markets. The company started working with the NIIT and MACNY last year to launch its apprenticeship program and announced the program formally with an apprenticeship signing at its headquarters in November 2021. According to Indium Corporation President and Chief Operating Officer Ross Berntson, Indium Corporation has gained a credentialed program that leverages the strengths of supervisors and subject matter experts, local colleges, and organizations such as the NIIT and MACNY. Berntson says, "By working with the NIIT and the MACNY-led partnership, we were able to design a program so that apprentices more effectively advance in their current positions and meet the rapidly emerging needs of the advanced manufacturing industry, especially semiconductors."

To learn more about this program, e-mail Laury Ferguson at Iferguson@macny.org or call her at 315-474-4201 extension 49. Visit www.niit-usa.org for more information on the NIIT and GAINS program.

To contact Tiffany directly, email tiffanylatinog@macny.org.

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#### MEET THE TEAM (From Left to Right)

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# **Do You Truly Understand Your Value Proposition?**



BY JAMES SHOMAR, CHIEF GROWTH OFFICER

WHEN A BUSINESS is looking to grow, the typical approach is to hire more sales staff, produce content marketing strategies, perform email and cold call campaigns, run advertisements, etcetera. These are just tactics; they're tools. Really leveraging your strengths and what you bring to the table better than anyone else requires a more sophisticated approach, one which starts with a concept known as "Customer Discovery."

Most businesses operate under the false assumption that they have an in-depth understanding of their market, the competitive landscape, their customers' perspective, or even the value created by their own products or services. By this I mean that because of the way businesses are organized and sales are conducted, the true underlying value of your product or service is very likely going overlooked — unintentionally — by you and your customers.

Think about how most sales conversations tend to go. When a salesperson asks about a customer's problems, it is primarily as a sales tactic. Once enough information has been uncovered to transition into a sales pitch, the investigation ends. The goal of that conversation is simply to get that customer to make a purchase.

Customer discovery conversations prioritize the gathering

of information over the sale.

That doesn't mean purposely leave a sale on the table. It just means that the primary motive of customer discovery conversations is to dive as deep as possible into the customer's perspective, their problems, and how you may be creating value for them that they don't realize.

Let's review a hypothetical example to illustrate the point: ABC Maintenance Inc. offers maintenance service for manufacturing companies' machinery. For decades they have positioned themselves as having the best customer service in the region. They may not be the cheapest option, but they're the highest quality and most responsive. That's their sales pitch. They decide to conduct some customer discovery interviews with past customers to test that idea and uncover how customers truly define value. "Tell us about your biggest pain points in operations right now." "Do you have a preventative maintenance plan?" "How are decisions made around maintenance of equipment?" "Do you have challenges getting your machines fixed in time?" "How much downtime has been caused this year because of maintenance issues?" "How much has that cost you?" and so on.

It turns out the biggest pain point for their customers is not the cost of repairs, it's the downtime of machines. Every day a machine is down, the customer is losing money. I don't mean just lost revenue either; I mean they are literally in the red that day, maybe even that entire week. ABC further realized they were two to three times faster than their competitors at getting machines back up and running. This fact was largely overlooked under the premise that the company's value proposition was customer service. While that's important, the real value was minimizing the downtime! Customers couldn't care less if ABC charged 25% or 50% more for their service as long as ABC was twice as fast at getting them back up and running, because the real cost was incurred during all the time the machines were sitting idle! Suddenly customers no longer view ABC as the "luxury" option but as a way to solve one of their most pressing operations problems. Customers were seeing a huge return on investment from contracting with them.



And ABC had been operating without that knowledge for decades...

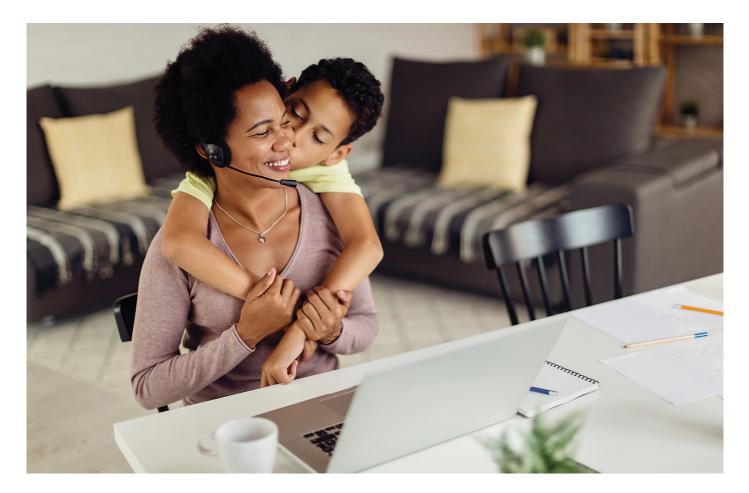
Think about the ripple effects this key insight could have on their business. A new perspective on the company's value could completely change the function of ABC's sales and marketing department. I envision a strategy of calling up the operations and maintenance staffs at area manufacturers and simply saying, "We're two to three times faster than any competitor which means we save our average customer X amount of dollars in recovered downtime. All I ask is that the next time something breaks, give me a call. Feel free to call all of our competitors, too, but we'll be the fastest." Who's going to forget that phone call? And every time something breaks, it's an opportunity for a follow-up call about a preventative maintenance plan or a new machine purchase, providing further return on investment.

The point is, before you can scale you need a deeper understanding of your customers, their problems, and what value you provide. I'm willing to bet that your sales department is not doing this to the extent required. Customer discovery involves deep conversations where you are intentionally prioritizing the gathering of information over the sale. This knowledge will give you leverage that could transform your business model, your messaging and marketing strategy, and ultimately provide a strategy for scale.

To contact James directly, email jshomar@macny.org.







# A New World for Employees and Employers



#### BY PATTY CLARK, ACCOUNTING & BENEFITS MANAGER

YEARS AGO, A new employee was given a standard package, set benefits and office hours, and a specific number of PTO and sick days. No one worked remotely, benefits were standard across the board, sign-on bonuses were only for C-suite level staff, and retention bonuses were unheard of for most. But as the working world changed, so did employees' demands, and accordingly, what employers were offering existing and new staff members to stay competitive. Employees were looking for more work-life balance, flexibility, career advancement, learning opportunities, and additional benefits — and some were willing to accept smaller wage increases in exchange.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit and the country shut down, many people were able to move to a remote work arrangement, but that was not an option for all. The United States had a record number of unemployment claims and people had time to reevaluate their lives, their jobs, and their careers. Some people realized they were able to change their lifestyle in order to stay home with their children. They thought about what they really wanted, reevaluating every aspect of their lives. This resulted in a labor shortage because people were not returning to jobs they previously held, choosing to either exit the workforce or change careers.

The labor shortage has employers looking at how they attract and retain staff. To retain employees, many companies have had to offer remote work to those whose positions allow for it, giving staff time back by eliminating their commute. Employers will need to ensure that those working remotely are able to work collaboratively and feel like part of the team. Interestingly, some companies have gone from hiring full-time employees to using contingent workers or contractors to cut costs and work on projects as needed.

Employers have also had to revisit employees' overall experiences, playing a larger role in supporting their financial, physical, and mental well-being. Employers are aiding their staffs with a more robust sick leave policy, helping out financially, adjusting work schedules, and even providing more help around elder care and childcare.

Employers are shifting focus away from employees' roles to the skills necessary for their roles. Improving skills may also open career opportunities or allow a worker to move up to a new role. It's a great time for companies to consider the workers in key roles and ask if they have the necessary skills to do their job and benefit the company. If the answer is no, there is an opportunity to develop a plan of action.

Some organizations have treated their staff as employees first and people second, while others have recognized the effect the pandemic has had on employees and taken a more humanizing approach. It is important for employers to be aware of the effect the pandemic has had on every aspect of people's lives, and no matter what approach they take, employers need to be aware of the effects their choice will have on their staff and the culture of the organization. How employees are treated, especially during a crisis, will make a difference in retention.

Employees need to make their employers aware of what they are looking for and what is important to them. If your employer doesn't know, they can't help. Don't be afraid to put yourself 100% into your job, meaning to be yourself authentically in the workplace. It will benefit you mentally and physically.

The demands of employees have changed, and employers need to listen. According to a 2021 IBM Institute for Business Value study, only 29% of Gen Z, compared to 49% of those over 55, felt benefits and salary "were key to their engagement." This indicates employers need to listen to the varied workforce and see what is important to them and in their lives. Plans can no longer be one size fits all. A Workforce Pulse survey by PwC found that younger workers — Gen Z and Millennials — would give up 10% or more of future earnings to be able to work remotely from anywhere. Employers need to encourage learning and growth of their staff and most importantly appreciate their workforce; do not take them for granted. Employers who show their staff they care about them as people will be the ones able to retain their staff.

The pandemic has shown employers and employees they cannot simply maintain the status quo if they want to thrive. Employees need to communicate their needs and wants with their employers, and employers need to listen and have a great relationship with their employees. One cannot exist without the other.

To contact Patty directly, email pclark@macny.org.



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Corey Nadeau, second from left, completed his apprenticeship at 110 Metalworks. Pictured with Nadeau is Eileen Donovan, Tessa Fellows, and Pete Adams, Nadeau's supervisor.

# Vision Through the Lens of Workforce Development



#### BY EILEEN DONOVAN, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST

**MACNY IS THE** voice and business solution leader for manufacturing excellence in Central and Upstate New York. Our vision, our call to action...but what do these words mean and how do we do it?

With manufacturing excellence as the goal, the solutions come into focus for us around the subject of workforce development. MACNY has long known that sustainable profitability and growth depend on our manufacturers' ability to attract and retain skilled workers. We didn't need COVID-19 to inform us that these workers are retiring in soaring numbers and that we need to lead with inspired solutions. Our members require immediate and long-term strategies.

Our affiliation with Partners for Education & Business, Inc. (PEB) is one big part of the long-term solution. For over 28 years now, PEB has worked with MACNY to develop the talent pipeline from school to career. Founder Joe Vargo believes that the original mission (paraphrased here) still resonates: to assure the economic vitality of Central New York by promoting, developing, and coordinating the involvement of schools, businesses, and the community in the task of preparing students for careers in Central New York. Throughout its history, PEB has excelled at providing in-person programming to deliver on its mission.

COVID-19 restrictions and protocols forced us to up our game and turn to virtual career exploration events. Working with strong industry volunteers, we served 600 students during the 2020-21 academic year, and reached close to 2,000 individuals through internet-based programming. The challenge presented by the crisis has also been an opportunity for PEB, as we expand our team and design innovative events.

We're proud of the fact that we have pivoted so quickly in the face of COVID-19. What was once a given — that we'd deliver our services face-to-face in a room full of students — has now become an option. In the span of one year, we have constructed and honed a hybrid platform and have accessed resources beyond our physical reach.

With PEB's attention on preparing our local students with needed skills for viable careers in Central New York, we have been hard at work expanding the other side of the department, Workforce Development, as a direct response to our member manufacturers' challenges: Where are the workers? How do we attract them? How do we train them? How do we retain them? We've known for a while that access to students who will make up their talent pool is critical; so is hiring, training, and retaining that workforce. Now, nearly two years after COVID-19 upset everyone's routines, our work has become even more significant.

To meet this new environment, MACNY continues to grow and expand NYS Registered Apprenticeships in Advanced Manufacturing across the state. Since the start of our sponsorship, we've delivered more than 20 Journey Worker Certificates through several programs. These are, for example, qualified CNC Machinists, Electro-Mechanical Technicians, and Quality Assurance professionals who are now certified to train others and to ensure their employers' viability well into the future.

Plant managers who understand that the investment in training is one way to address the tide of retiring talent turn to MACNY for solutions. They know that Registered Apprenticeship is a solid strategy to address the lack of skilled workers. For this time-tested, earn-while-youlearn training method, MACNY offers help in different ways: as the sponsor of apprenticeship programs for employers, or as a contractor as employers apply to attain Department of Labor approval to sponsor apprenticeship programs themselves. Apprenticeship is a solution we work to expand.

We know that finding people is vital to both short-term and ultimate sustainability. This roadmap includes our Career & Talent Platform. Since we launched this powerful recruiting and hiring tool two years ago, we've filled nearly 350 positions across New York State and have attracted over 10,000 applicants with whom our subscribers interact.

Recent improvements to the platform include an assessment tool (another upgrade made at the request of our member manufacturers who find themselves having to hire individuals from other industries, those who haven't worked in a manufacturing environment), and the ability to offer virtual job fairs.

New initiatives, like Youth Apprenticeship and Operation Next (working with service members transitioning back to civilian life), have necessitated the hiring of additional team members. It's exciting and challenging to have so much on our plates. We're thrilled to accelerate our contribution to MACNY's vision for manufacturing excellence in Central and Upstate New York with innovative workforce development programs.

Let us know how we can help by emailing Laury Ferguson at Iferguson@macny.org.

To contact Eileen directly, email edonovan@macny.org.



Klim Kazantsev, with his wife Irina and son Eustace.

#### **Congratulations!**

Recently certified Maintenance Mechanic Klim Kazantsev received his NYSDOL Journey Worker Certificate and Card at MACNY's office. We're so proud of Klim, who spent his four-year apprenticeship at Berry Global in Solvay, NY, completing 8,000 hours of on-the-job training and over 700 hours of related technical instruction.

Congratulations to the individuals who have graduated from MACNY's groupsponsored Registered Apprenticeship program. Since we launched the program in 2017, we have presented Journey Worker Certificates to nine CNC Machinists, five Electro-Mechanical Technicians, four Maintenance Mechanics, three Quality Assurance Auditors, and an Electronics Technician, a Manufacturing Engineering Technician, and a Toolmaker. These 24 skilled workers represent 13 different Central New York manufacturers.



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# Knock, Knock...It's Opportunity at the Door



BY CINDY OEHMIGEN, DIRECTOR OF ENERGY & CORPORATE SERVICES

I DON'T REMEMBER a time when the weather was in the news as much as it is now. Certainly, there were occasional natural disasters that occupied the front page for days, but not so many separate storms or events that came one right after the other across the entire nation. Not only are there more, the impacts of each on people and the economy are growing. I am certain the political climate is also contributing to more frequent conversations around climate change.

It is one thing to recognize we have a challenge ahead of us. It's altogether different to know what to do about it. No one thinks this is easy. However, I find it encouraging that there are initiatives to address the things we know we can change, and innovations that may help us address the things we currently think we can't change.

#### WHAT CAN CONSUMERS DO?

- **1.** Look for new, more earth-friendly products: low-impact packaging, made from recycled materials, produced locally
- 2. Bring your own cloth bags to the store
- 3. Sign up for Community Solar
- 4. Use a refillable water bottle
- 5. Turn off lights or install motion-activated switches

Make your next car an electric vehicle (EV)
 Shop online

#### WHAT CAN MANUFACTURERS DO?

**1.** Make time to audit processes for any kind of waste: resources, people's time, water, air, energy

**2.** Seek out local suppliers to minimize transportation (and contributions to greenhouse gas emissions)

3. Install EV stations/encourage employees

- to consider electric vehicles
- **4.** Convert your fleet to EV

**5.** Consider alternative equipment to replace fossil fuel use

**6.** Seek to leverage wind, solar, or hydro power to fuel operations

#### **HOW DO I GET STARTED?**

You don't need to go it alone; bring in experts to assist:

1. MACNY can help eliminate waste

- a. Lean Six Sigma
- b. Quality Tools
- **c.** Problem-solving tools

**2.** Pollution Prevention Institute (P2I) rit.edu/affiliate/nysp2i/about-nysp2i

a. Works with companies to reduce "down

the drain, up the stack or to the landfill" **3.** New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) nyserda.ny.gov

**a.** Programs to help companies improve energy efficiency

i. Strategic Energy Manager (SEM)

ii. Onsite Energy Manager (OSEM)

- III. Virtual Treasure Hunt (VTH)
- iv. Carbon Challenge (CIC)
- v. Flex Tech

**b.** Programs to encourage use of renewable energy sources

- i. NY-Sun (solar)
- ii. Wind Generation
- iii. Hydro

iv. Electrification of transportation

New York state is vying for best-in-class Clean Energy Programs. The state's ambitious goals should be common knowledge by now. It will take all of us doing our part to make this happen, but I have witnessed how New Yorkers can come together to address a serious challenge.

So far, I have only been discussing the social responsibility, the altruistic side of this challenge. As is usually the case, when there is a challenge. it is balanced by opportunity. I attended and participated in some renewable forums just prior to writing this. Assume for a minute you are not yet inspired to take up the green flag. What if you found yourself connected to the prime developers who are looking feverishly to source parts and supplies locally? The two most prominent themes at both events were finding workers and finding local suppliers. Just to give you a peek at the scale of the opportunity, there are over 14 large solar projects already on the books with thousands of various components. I am confident the same is true for the wind energy market.

I hear the concerns companies have about moving to renewables and what it may cost. The cost of not doing anything has to be taken into consideration, too. Not only does the environment suffer, but it is also very likely your large customers soon will be requiring proof that you are making efforts to reduce your carbon footprint. Cost, either way, is inevitable. I believe there is a substantial growth opportunity for companies who choose to pursue this industry. I learned there are multiple organizations interested in supporting this endeavor.

New resources are being established to connect companies with these developers. An additional, indirect benefit is that sourcing locally will minimize transportation costs and will help drive positive impact on greenhouse gas emissions.

I am very interested to hear from you about what barriers you foresee in your company's path to convert to renewables.

To contact Cindy directly, email coehmigen@macny.org.



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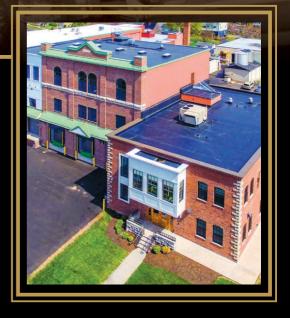
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From left, Laura Brown, Human Resources Manager, Chris Dugan, President, and Jesse Conklin, Plant Manager at the Knowles Precision Devices headquarters in Cazenovia, NY.

# Filtering Out the Noise

**WITH SO MUCH** changing information and so many different demands coming at us each day, it is important to regroup around your company's mission and values, and the people who live those daily. It's not news to anyone that workforce development continues to be a priority, and this has been accelerated by the changes brought on because of the pandemic. We spoke to a local company that has focused its energy on connecting with and developing its people as a key part of its success strategy.





# Building a Performance Culture

**FROM CAPTURING NEIL** Armstrong's words on the moon during the Apollo 11 mission to providing integral parts on the International Space Station, Knowles Corporation has been a leading provider of high-performance audio solutions and specialty electronic components since its founding in 1946. In 2014, Knowles Corporation combined several strategic acquisitions, including Dielectric Laboratories (DLI), Novacap, Syfer, and Voltronics to form Knowles Precision Devices. Cazenovia-based Knowles Precision Devices is the fastest growing division of the business, focusing on highly engineered capacitors and radio frequency (RF) components used in critical applications across several sectors. Locally

the division employs 237 people in manufacturing and engineering roles, with more than 1,200 employees working in facilities in the Americas, Europe, and Asia.

We asked Knowles Precision Devices President Chris Dugan to share how the company has adapted to the changing market and about its emphasis on workforce development.

#### WHAT DOES YOUR COMPANY MAKE?

Knowles is primarily a supplier of high-performance Micro-Electro-Mechanical Systems (MEMs) microphones used in hearing aids, laptops, and mobile phones. By contrast, our division (Precision Devices) focuses on the design and Above, employees stack and laminate dielectric material in the Knowles Precision Devices headquarters.

### 

knowlescapacitors. com/careers production of a wide variety of highly engineered capacitors and microwave and millimeter wave (mmWave) RF components that are used in critical applications in military, space, medical, electric vehicle (EV), and 5G market segments. The specialty components we design and develop include multilayer ceramic, single-layer, highreliability, and precision variable capacitors; electromagnetic interference (EMI) filters: and microwave devices such as RF filters, splitters, and couplers. Our capacitors have very special applications, but in essence a capacitor does two things: it takes a constant source of power and makes it a variable source, and it can filter out unwanted electromagnetic waves that might disrupt a circuit. An RF filter essentially acts like a skinny tube you might use to talk to someone across a noisy room. They hear what you want them to hear, not the noise. The spectrum used for radars, jammers, and 5G telephone signals is noisy. We help get a clean signal where it's needed.

### WHAT MAKES YOUR COMPANY DIFFERENT?

We're very intentional about focusing on customers and applications where the systems are operating at high voltages, temperatures, or frequencies. A good example is the components we sell into the electric vehicle (EV) market. They are very rugged and can operate in much higher temperatures and voltages than the commodity parts that go into a combustion engine vehicle. Not surprisingly, they are also significantly more expensive. Similarly, the parts that filter signals for a radar or electronic warfare jammer are very specialized and undergo rigorous testing. A lot of those filters are developed and produced here in our Cazenovia facility. For a company our size, we're heavy on engineering and development because we compete primarily on innovation, not on price.

#### TO WHAT FACTORS WOULD YOU ATTRIBUTE YOUR COMPANY'S SUCCESS?

There are myriad factors, but the key ones are people, culture, and intentionality in where we play. While we've invested in a lot of great technology, people are still designing the filters, interacting with suppliers to get materials,



A tape casting machine is ready for the next run.

working with customers to define the order, and operating the machines to produce and ship the product. We select good people to join us, and we've defined as one of our four strategic priorities the development and communication of clear employee career paths, cross training, and skills exchanges in order to ensure we have an environment that enables every team member to deliver their best contribution every day. Our culture is well defined by our core values: model ownership of your tasks, develop and leverage talent, demonstrate urgency, stretch to improve, project a positive mindset, and be transparent and data driven. In terms of intentionality, we're market centric. We focus our energy and capital on the subset of markets that reward engineering engagement and development of high-performance components. If you try to be everything to every customer, you'll flounder.

#### HOW DO YOU APPROACH RECRUITMENT, TRAINING, AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT?

A few years ago, partly due to our rapid growth, we had retention problems at a couple of our sites. When we dug into the root causes of people leaving, we realized it wasn't about money in most cases, but about poor onboarding training, lack of clarity about career paths, and lack of understanding about the business' direction. We needed to do a much better job explaining our mission and equipping our team to deliver their best each day. Most of it was addressable with training and communication; some of the correction involved removing people who weren't supportive of our values. Because this effort was well underway before COVID, not only did we not see the level of attrition that some of our neighbors did, we also saw an impressive increase in productivity.





Left, a fiber laser cuts through sintered dielectric material. Above, looking into a Class 6 photolithography cleanroom.

Our tools include a focus on retaining all our talent through open communication, continuous training and development opportunities, and providing rewarding and meaningful career paths. We also promote from within whenever we can, and make sure management regularly engages with all employees to ensure everyone understands our mission and knows their work is valued here. When I was a soldier, it was easy to figure out how our missions linked in with the wider effort. It's harder to get that clarity in business. We start every employee update with our Mission to Metrics cascade, which reminds our team what our mission, goals, value, and strategy are, and what we're working on specifically to bring those to fruition, so they can tie their daily activity to mission outcome.

We also started a monthly Zoom call where different team members share information with the broader team. We call it "Facts and Snacks," and the presenters come from all of our global sites and multiple functions. It could be a description of a new product, explanation of our business strategy, or a description of how a new IT platform works. It's always well attended and helps us build and sustain the fabric of our organization.

#### WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE SMALLEST CHANGE YOU'VE MADE THAT HAS HAD THE BIGGEST POSITIVE RESULT?

The leadership team has made a conscious effort to empower local, cross-functional teams to make more decisions themselves, instead of punting them to senior leaders. Part of making that work is asking questions instead of offering an answer. Another part is ensuring that the people making the decisions understand that it's safe for them to make decisions. Some decisions may not have the outcomes we originally desired, but if the decision process is solid, consistent with our controls, and based on data, we should support the decision maker. That seems like a small thing, but we think it's critical in continuing to build a performance culture. Why hire and develop smart people if you aren't going to let them make decisions?

#### WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE YOU THINK YOUR COMPANY OR SECTOR FACES GOING FORWARD?

I can think of 3 top-of-mind challenges.

Technically, there is constant pressure among electronic systems manufacturers for components

suppliers to relentlessly reduce size, weight, power, and cost (SWAP-C). This is because everything from medical devices to consumer electronics to military radar systems is getting smaller, which means every component needs to become smaller and lighter. However, at the same time this is happening, there is also a need for single devices to serve multiple functions, and, especially on the consumer side, there is always a need to reduce costs. This has and will continue to put a lot of pressure on vendors like us to not only make smaller, more capable components, but also to do some component-level integration through integrated passive devices (IPDs) and integrated microwave assemblies (IMAs). We have a very strong engineering team, and we'll continue to pursue SWAP-C through organic initiatives, partnerships, and acquisitions.

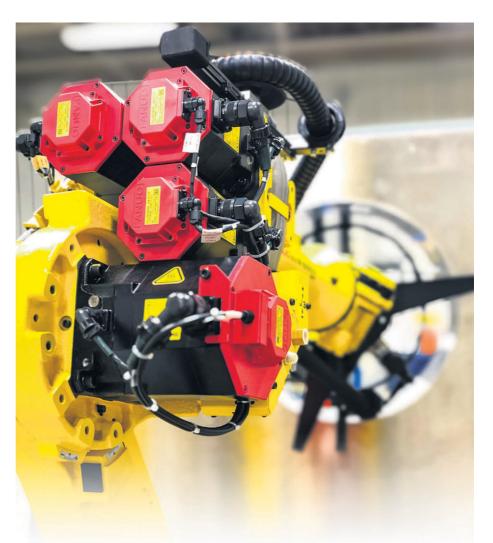
Economically, COVID really brought visibility to the challenge of finding technically competent employees, and accelerated the wages of employees. I'm happy that all of our employees can make a living wage. But the combination of a smaller pool of new labor and higher wages and benefits costs, combined with the pressure from customers to reduce component costs, puts us in a challenging margin environment. Like most manufacturers, we are investing in LEAN efforts, quality improvements to increase production yields, and technology to automate repetitive manual work. When a teammate asked me what our Cazenovia facility will look like in five years, I said "we'll have a similar number of employees, but we'll be producing significantly more. Each worker will be capable of working in several production cells, and they will be more valuable to us the more flexible they are." I think that can be a win-win situation.

Geopolitically, there's risk everywhere. We're a global company, with customers in North America, Asia, and Europe. Anything from a trade action to a border skirmish could impact our sales. We are investing in tools to protect our intellectual property. We are looking at ways to hedge our risk of materials shortages from geopolitical issues. If you are doing business globally, you need to constantly think "what's the insurance I can create today to offset some future event."

#### ANYTHING ELSE YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE?

First, I want to say how much I appreciate what MACNY does, and how well they do it. I've been on the MACNY board for a couple years, and I'm constantly impressed by the focus on issues that matter, and on how much you get done with a small team. We are excited to engage with the P-TECH Program through MACNY. We have employees who serve as P-TECH coaches who regularly meet with students in the program to provide coaching and mentoring on a wide range of employment topics. During these sessions, we educate students on our company and industry, review job expectations, provide information on how to successfully grow and develop to reach career goals, assist with resume preparation, hold mock interviews, and coach students on how to make a great impression. Participating in P-TECH has been a very rewarding experience for us, and we are excited to be contributing to the success of our future workforce and giving back to our local communities.

We also want to be sure that readers know that we are hiring. We have many manufacturing and engineering positions open in our Cazenovia facility. Join our growing business!



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# Resilience



#### BY DAVID FREUND, CHIEF LEADERSHIP OFFICER

**THE LAST COUPLE** of years have taught us that our organizations need to be resilient. Whether it's market shifts, labor shortages, supply chain disruptions, or social unrest, we never know what will hit us next. We build contingencies into our plans. We cross-train, have backup suppliers, and maintain cash reserves for the unexpected. But what about you? How resilient are you? Do you have the tools to emotionally weather the storms of life? My guess is that you are a lot like me. Some days, it feels like you do, and some days you don't. As leaders, we don't want to admit that we struggle at times, but as Max De Pree said so well, "Leaders define

reality," and the reality is we all struggle from time to time.

I remember a time when the organization I was running was in a cash crunch. Every day I waited for the mail to see if any checks had arrived. My anxiety continued to rise day after day. Noticing the stress I was under, my wife suggested that we visit the Antique Boat Show in Clayton, New York. As I walked the docks in their beautiful boathouse, I felt my chest tighten and I started breathing faster. My mind was racing with fear. How do I solve our cash issue? Would I need to liquidate the company? That thought was completely irrational. We were in a tough spot but would get through it like so many times before in our 90 years of doing business. What had happened to me? I am typically optimistic. I see opportunities when others don't. I like thinking outside of the box. I lost my mental and emotional resilience, and I was in a scary place.

Every leader has times when their resilience is waning, and just like in our organizations, we need to plan for such times. Here are some simple steps we can all take to become more resilient:

**Take a crisis inventory** – Take the time to write down what you have been through in your life. Just in most recent history, you have survived Y2K, 9/11, Anthrax, Bird Flu, The Great Recession, and now COVID-19. These are only events on the national and world level. You have also endured many personal challenges, perhaps health challenges, financial setbacks, relationship issues. You are the proof that you can survive very difficult times.

#### Define Reality - We need to listen to

Max De Pree. When faced with a challenge, we need to determine what is happening. Not what we think or what we feel is happening, but what is really happening. What are the concerns? We need to face our fears and write them out. This allows us to clarify the issue so we don't catastrophize.

#### Talk things over with a thinking partner -

A thinking partner is critical to resilience. They allow us to think out loud and offer clarifying questions, support, encouragement, and also constructive criticism when we need it. They can often ask us questions to reveal realities that we are missing, realities that can offer us confidence and hope.

**Get your rest** – Fatigue exacerbates feelings of helplessness. When we sleep, we give our brains and bodies time to heal. When we sleep, our bodies increase protein production that fuels growth and helps our bodies recover from the damages of stress and other factors. **Know your why** – Knowing our "why" keeps us centered when the winds of change and turmoil try to push us around. It reminds us that our life indeed has meaning and purpose. This fuels the energy to push forward regardless of the headwinds.

**Get some exercise** – According to the Mayo Clinic, exercise increases your overall health and your sense of well-being, thanks to endorphins produced during physical activity.

Keep learning and growing – The only guarantee we have for tomorrow are the actions we take today to prepare ourselves for whatever comes our way. Growth and learning today supply us with the answers for the questions that we will have tomorrow.

David Freund is MACNY's chief leadership officer and a certified speaker, trainer, and executive coach with the John Maxwell Team. Contact him directly at dfreund@macny.org.



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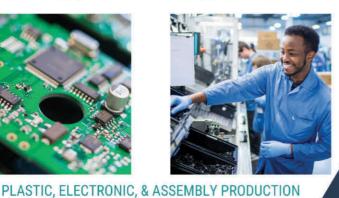


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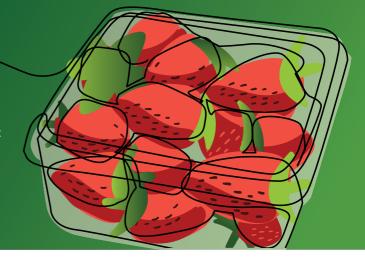
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Advance Media New York47	Liberty T
All Seasonings Ingredients 11	Maratho
Bartell Machinery 29	Marquar
C&S Companies16	National
Cathedral Candle Company22	NBT Ban
Currier Plastics	OneGrou
Diversified Wealth Strategies13	Onondag
Empower Federal Credit Union23	Pelco Co
Fust Charles Chambers LLP8	The Rayr
FuzeHub17	Sturges I
Gear Motions21	Syracuse
Haylor, Freyer & Coon, Inc19	Thompso Equipme
Indium Corporation6	Veritiv Co
Jamestown Container Companies4	

Liberty Tabletop16
Marathon Energy48
Marquardt Switches, Inc
National Grid2
NBT Bank9
OneGroup
Onondaga Historical Association
Pelco Component Technologies20
The Raymond Corporation24
Sturges Manufacturing21
Syracuse Regional Airport 20
Thompson & Johnson Equipment Co., Inc17
Veritiv Corporation45



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**Central Upstate Mfg.** is published for MACNY by Advance Media New York

Photo credits, pages 25-28, 46: Amelia Beamish

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