

Area Business Leaders Inspire Students Seeking Careers in Skilled Trades

By Alyssa Lally, Lee's Summit Economic Development Council

Major employers from across the Kansas City area logged online Monday to participate in first-ever Virtual Career Expo: Skilled & Technical Trades. The event was hosted by the Lee's Summit Economic Development Council, Herndon Career Center, and Southland CAPS in order to inform students, parents and teachers about the rewarding career opportunities in the skilled and technical trades.

"We chose to focus on a variety of careers that require a non-traditional post-secondary education, whether that is a trade school, apprenticeship, or on-the-job training," said LSEDC Director of Business Development Tina Chace. "People are often surprised by the opportunities that these industries can provide."

Panels were separated by industry with topics including machine & tool fabrication, manufacturing, construction, automotive & diesel, residential trades & services, and power & energy. Students were able to submit questions for industry experts, who shed light on training requirements, training assistance, salary expectations, upward mobility and more.

John Coleman owns Coleman Equipment in Lee's Summit and participated in the automotive & diesel panel discussion. He said he hopes to create awareness about career paths that might not be traditionally encouraged by educational institutions.

"Students who do not, or should not, go to college have other options that may better-equip them for available jobs in their community," said Coleman. "There are good quality careers, and often less competition, in fields that require a skill or trade that is easily accessible to many students."

In many of the careers that were highlighted throughout the event, college or a four-year degree are not required. Many industry experts also informed students about opportunities for paid training or apprenticeships, where students could get paid to learn a valuable skill.

"Historically, many people have a narrow impression of the trades, but the reality is these are highly-skilled positions that may even use advanced technology skills. Employers are eager to have candidates that can fulfill those roles," said Chace. "We hope this event helps to put a little spotlight on some of the opportunities out there for students as they make career decisions."

The Lee's Summit R-7 School district was among the districts which participated in the event. Representatives with the district said the event gave students valuable insight into career possibilities.

"This event supports the Real World Learning Initiative because it provides our students with career exposure. It is important that we expose our students to many career options as much as possible so they have a clear picture of what is available to them as a career," said Shannan Booth, the Coordinator of Career Education for LSR-7.

The panel discussions are online to watch on-demand at <https://sites.google.com/view/virtual-career-expo/home>.