

LoginRegistere-NewslettersContestsCouponsPlace an AdSubscriber Services

JSOnline

enter keywords

search

WEATHER WATCH: Milwaukee, WI17°

high 17° | low 15°

Detailed Forecast | 7 Day | Doppler Radar | Alerts | TMJ4 Weather Blog

eHarmony

JSOnline

MILWAUKEE • WISCONSIN

JOURNAL SENTINEL

HomeNewsWatchdogOpinionSportsBusinessFood & DiningEntertainmentFeaturesPhoto/Video

ClassifiedJobNogginCarSoupHomesMarketplace

Saturday, December 12, 2009Main PageStocks SearchWisconsin StocksNew Faces, New PlacesTorinusSalerE-mail Newsletter

Business

Home » Business

Survey finds more in U.S. avoid hands-on projects or repairs

By Rick Barrett of the Journal Sentinel

Posted: Dec. 11, 2009

Forum: Are you handy?

Few Attempts

Lost Projects

The United States has become a nation of "non-tinkerers," a new survey shows, and it has harmed the way we live and work.

In a poll of 1,000 U.S. adults, nearly six in 10 said they had never made or built a toy.

Twenty-seven percent had not made or built even one item from a list of eight common projects, including furniture and a flower box.

Sixty percent avoided doing major household repairs themselves, noted the survey from The Foundation of the Fabricators and Manufacturers Association, based in Rockford, Ill.

It's worrisome because the "hands off" policy around the house has kept people from learning valuable skills - including ones associated with productive careers, according to the association, which has more than 2,300 members in the metal fabrication industry.

"Many Americans simply do not work with their hands anymore, whether it's to tackle a hobby for pleasure or to handle a necessary household repair. Young people essentially have no role models when it comes to fixing things or taking pride in building something," said Gerald Shankel, Fabricators and Manufacturers Association president.

"It's no wonder why so many teens today dismiss the idea of a career in manufacturing or one in electrical, plumbing, carpentry or welding," Shankel said.

There's a growing shortage of tinkerers and people with hands-on skills in the workplace.

The Hudson Institute, a public policy think tank in Washington, D.C., predicts the supply of skilled labor in the U.S. will not catch up with the demand until the year 2050.

Many studies predict a labor shortage as waves of blue-collar workers reach retirement age.

A national poll of 500 teenagers, however, showed that 73% had little or no interest in those hands-on careers.

"It's absolutely critical for this mind-set to change because when America recovers from our economic downturn, there will be a dire need for skilled manpower in the trades," said John Ratzenberger, producer of the television show "John Ratzenberger's Made in America."

"We need to convey that such occupations are honorable ones," Ratzenberger said. "And if adults are not showing by example the joys and feelings of accomplishment gained from tinkering, they at least should take time every week to encourage children to play with plastic tools or even take a household item apart and put it back together."

Leads to inventions

Wisconsin's industrial heritage is based on tinkerers, including the founders of Harley-Davidson, Mercury Marine, Briggs & Stratton and other large manufacturers.

Tinkering is a natural part of inventing things, said Eric Isbister, chief executive officer of General MetalWorks Corp., in Mequon.

Isbister was a chief nuclear engineer for the submarine division of General Dynamics Corp. before his second career in manufacturing. He works with Project Lead the Way, a national program that encourages students to pursue careers in engineering and sciences and receives funding from The Kern Family Foundation, based in Waukesha.

Tools

print

e-mail

TEXT SIZE AA-+

Yahoo! Buzz

reddit

Delicious

facebook

Newsvine

Digg it

Technorati

Mixx

TOP STORIES

advertisement

Bill gives Barrett mega power over schools

In need of a 100-acre Wood

Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit coming alive

It's best to avoid BPA, federal official says

MU's Hayward is no secret

MORE BUSINESS

Recovery remains fragile amid signs of strength

Survey finds more in U.S. avoid hands-on projects or repairs

Regents approve \$50 million UWM water school plan

Johnson Controls ends 'golden coffins' benefits

Doyle outlines plans for climate trip

Orion partners with California firm

Pabst project, Bayshore, 735 N. Water building win recognition

Small fire delays work at Oak Creek plant

Most Popular - Business

most read e-mailed

more most popular content...

1 of 3

12/12/09 08:02

An engineer, Isbister likes to roll up his sleeves and tinker with things.

"Engineers love to solve problems," he said. "When we go into a room, we want to straighten the picture that's hanging crooked on the wall. When there's a leaky faucet, we want to get a wrench and fix it."

Isbister said he agrees that we are becoming a nation of non-tinkerers, and he worries about the consequences.

"If someone doesn't know which way to turn a screw or what tool to use in fixing something, they will shy away from tinkering-type careers. Then we will have a nation of service workers and paper pushers."

Reaching out to youth

At Milwaukee School of Engineering, students are encouraged to do hands-on work as part of their studies.

MSOE also reaches out to children, encouraging them to tinker.

Friday, about 90 middle-school students were at the college as part of a program meant to get kids excited about careers in fluid technologies – things such as hydraulics.

"Kids love to touch things and do things," said Julie Schuster, MSOE associate director of admissions.

"We want to show them that things like fluid power can be fun. It's important because by the time they get to high school they often have preconceived notions of what they want to do when they grow up."

At Wagner Corp., a Milwaukee manufacturer with an eclectic mix of metal products, high school teachers are asked to visit the plant to learn about the skilled trades and pass that knowledge on to their students.

Hands-on skills are important at the company, where employees make custom products on tight deadlines.

"It's a little tougher in these down times, but people in fields such as tool and die making are in short supply," said Robert Wagner, company chief executive officer.

Six in 10 teenagers had never visited or toured a factory, according to another Fabricators and Manufacturers survey. Only 28% had taken an industrial arts or shop class.

"It's a tragedy that we no longer teach our young people to work with their hands or even encourage them to try it on their own," Ratzenberger said.

"When so few experience a factory tour or can't take pride in finishing a shop project, it's no wonder that a manufacturing career receives low marks."

Even if manufacturing does not rebound, Ratzenberger added: "This country is going to be in trouble if we don't have people who can weld or operate a backhoe. Who are you going to call when your air-conditioner breaks or the sewer backs up? A hedge-fund manager?"



E-mail Newsletter

Get today's business headlines delivered to your inbox Monday-Friday during the noon hour.

enter your e-mail a

Sign Up Now!

Enter your e-mail address above and click "Sign Up Now!" to begin receiving your e-mail newsletter
[Login](#) or [Register](#) to manage all your newsletter preferences.

Snow Quiz



Test your knowledge of the white stuff

Cookie Contest



Top designs, simple cookies and more

Sponsored Links

"Killer White Teeth"

Dentists DO NOT want you to know THIS #1 teeth whitening secret!
[ConsumersTeethReport.com](#)

Acai Berry: Superfood OR Superscam?

We Investigate Acai Berry. Is Acai a Miracle Diet or Internet Scam?
[ConsumerHealthNews](#)

Spinal Stenosis Treatment

Get Free MRI Review & Info on Laser Procedures for Spinal Stenosis.
[www.LaserSpineInstitute.com](#)

Elsewhere on JSONline

Readers' Picks



Best catering in Milwaukee

Holiday TV



Listing of holiday TV specials

Holiday Calendar



Holiday events, concerts, and shows

Giving Guide



See how you can help area groups

