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## Baltimore shows off its manufacturing for visiting engineers

Conference-goers get taste of Domino Sugars, 3-D technology



Baltimore, MD -- Visitors are dwarfed by among large machinery that churn product during a tour of Domino's Sugar refinery Tuesday, Jun. 4, 2013. (Karl Merton Ferron/Baltimore Sun Staff) [ [\_DSC7199.JPG]] (Karl Merton Ferron / Baltimore Sun / June 4, 2013)

By Jamie Smith Hopkins, The Baltimore Sun

June 9, 2013

Men and women wearing hairnets, hard hats, safety glasses and bright-orange vests wended their way through Domino Sugars' Baltimore refinery Tuesday — there to look, not work.

The manufacturing engineers and engineering students toured Domino as part of an international conference in town this week, a chance for boosters to get people thinking of Baltimore-area manufacturing in present and future tense rather than past.

The Society of Manufacturing Engineers says new-wave manufacturing — 3-D printing, specifically — is one reason officials decided to meet in Baltimore this year. A small but active cluster of companies, schools and advocates are using and promoting that technology here.

Local manufacturers, meanwhile, saw the conference as an opportunity to get the region on the radar of industrial players in other places.

"These are ... the guys that are on future search committees — where do you put your next plant," said Drew Greenblatt, president of Baltimore-based [Marlin Steel Wire Products](#), one of the tour stops.

Much of the manufacturing movement in the Baltimore area the last few decades was out, not in. The metro area has 56,000 manufacturing jobs, 100,000 fewer than it did in 1980 — reduced by closures, relocations and technological advances.

But Greenblatt thinks the area can be competitive for manufacturing facilities highly reliant on the sort of employees in town for the engineers' conference.

"Our state is producing a lot of engineers," Greenblatt said. "This is our strong suit, and we should be playing toward it."

Bill Ballard, a partner with EFI Group, a Baltimore-based manufacturing and engineering consultancy, also envisions a manufacturing future for the region that's unlike its past.

"Manufacturing can re-establish itself in Baltimore and Maryland, but you're not going to see factories that hire thousands of people," said Ballard, whose company sponsored the tours. "This will be more smaller manufacturing of high-tech equipment that will be important to the world economy. Closeness to the port and the ability to export out of Baltimore is huge."

The state says it wants to attract more manufacturing. The revived Maryland Advisory Commission on Manufacturing Competitiveness is due to make recommendations to state officials in the fall, and a new workforce training initiative is aimed in part at manufacturers.

"We are increasing manufacturing competitiveness, and along with that, the aim is also to increase jobs," said Jeff Fuchs, who heads the commission and spoke at the engineers' conference.

The conference tours included stops at Ellicott Dredges — visited by President Barack Obama last month — and NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in addition to Marlin Steel and Domino Sugars.

At Domino, engineers got to see one of the last remaining large manufacturers from the city's industrial past. The company's Baltimore refinery opened in 1922.

Even people who aren't interested in manufacturing could get behind that tour. The very air — inside and outside of the buildings — smells sweet. Machinery roars. Workers driving heavy equipment move raw sugar in the refinery's massive shed, which can hold piles more than 60 feet tall. Everything is *big*.

"We ... have a cargo ship there that's holding about 40 million pounds of sugar," said Bernard Boyle, a maintenance supervisor who guided one of the tour groups through the plant.

It's a place that doesn't lend itself to a speedy visit, not if you want to see all the steps involved in taking sugar from cargo ship to bagged products heading out on tractor-trailers. Boyle moved his charges through at a brisk clip to make sure they could see at least most of the process before they had to rush back to their bus. Next and final stop: Marlin Steel.

Greenblatt's father, company director Marshal "Mickey" Greenblatt, led the group around the manufacturing floor, with its robotics and skilled employees. Then he handed them over to the firm's mechanical engineers.

The company made bagel baskets when Drew Greenblatt bought it in 1998 and moved it from New York to Baltimore. Now it makes [wire baskets](#) and other products for industrial clients in need of accuracy to the 1/4,000th of an inch, which means plenty of engineering.

Tony Witt, Marlin Steel's chief engineer, talked about cutting back on waste — the customers' as well as the company's — and answered questions about day-to-day business. There's the "skills matrix" on the wall, for instance, which shows who knows how to do what: Handy for a small firm when someone happens to be out.

"We try to cross-train the company as much as possible," Witt said.

Edye Buchanan, a board member with the Society of Manufacturing Engineers, which now goes by SME, said she was impressed by what she saw on the tours — and at the conference's earlier tech fair, which focused on 3-D printing.

"It really gave people a good chance to see what 3-D printing is all about," said Buchanan, a product manager for Fives North American Combustion, a Cleveland manufacturer.

Michael Raphael, founder and president of Direct Dimensions in Owings Mills, organized the tech fair and set up his own demonstration of 3-D modeling. His company's ShapeShot photo booth takes three-dimensional pictures that can be manufactured later into busts, jewelry and other items using a 3-D printer, a step handled by outside companies using ShapeShot's photos.

About 75 conference-goers — and Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, who spoke to attendees — sat for photos.

Raphael sees big potential in 3D, not just for his company, but for the nation. This, he thinks, is how Baltimore could rebuild manufacturing.

"We have a very strong shot at being a serious leader in this technology," he said. "We may not have the conventional manufacturing base, but we have a lot of other things. We have research institutes and government demand. ... We have tremendous hospital medical institutes."

He's thrilled that the engineering society saw 3-D printing as a reason to come to Baltimore.

"And they should," Raphael said.

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