

# UNC, praises local manufacturing

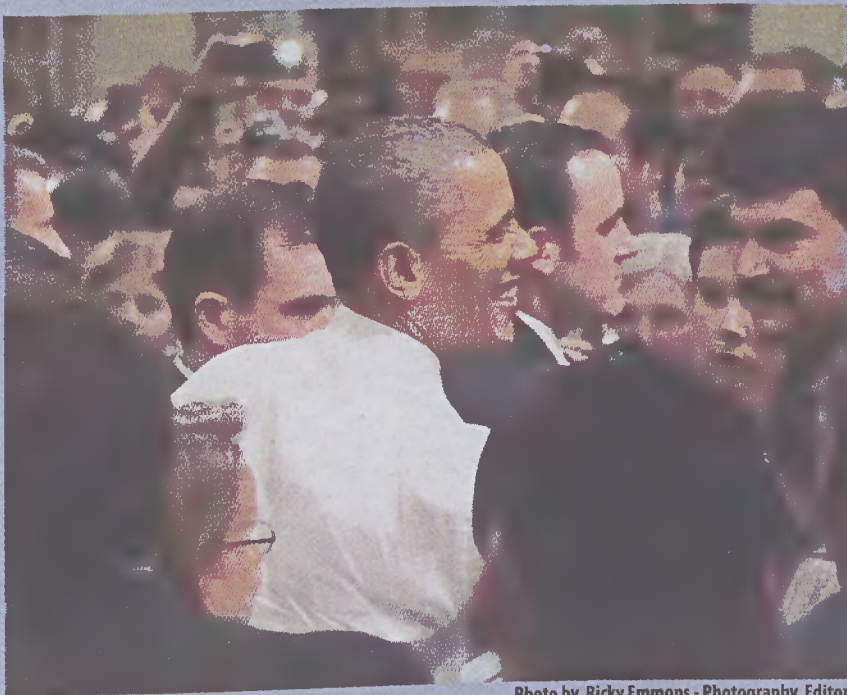


Photo by Ricky Emmons - Photography Editor

President Obama interacts with the crowd after his speech at the Linamar Corporation plant. Audience members included employees of the Linamar plant and Asheville Mayor Terry Bellamy.

their kids are doing even better than them, that's the American dream."

Despite noting economic growth in the automotive and housing industries during his State of the Union address on Feb. 12, Obama said the American economy must make moves to bring manufacturing back to the states a priority in the coming years.

"I believe we attract new jobs to America by investing in new sources of energy and new infrastructure and the next generation of high-wage, high-tech American manufacturing. I believe in manufacturing. I think it makes our country stronger," Obama told Linamar employees.

The president praised both Linamar and Asheville for an effort to renew manufacturing processes that once provided jobs for thousands in western North Carolina.

Volvo, who previously manufactured in the area, vacated their plant in 2008, taking 228 jobs with them.

"That was a big blow for this area," Obama said.

The president praised local officials for reaching out to companies with incentives to rebuild the manufacturing industry in this part of the state, an action he said needs to spread nationwide.

In 2011, Linamar Corporation, a

Canadian-based engine parts manufacturer, announced a plan to invest \$125 million in a new Asheville plant and create 400 jobs by 2020.

"While they could have gone any place in the world, they saw this incredible potential right here in Asheville," Obama said. "They saw the most promise in this workforce, so they chose to invest in Asheville, in North Carolina, in the United States of America."

According to the president, the Asheville Linamar plant has already provided 160 jobs to Asheville-area residents, and has plans to increase that number to 200 by the year's end.

Some of those jobs were filled by those laid off by Volvo and other manufacturers who left the area, including **Stratton Tatum, former Volvo employee and current quality technician for Linamar.**

Tatum, who introduced the president Wednesday, said the president's visit bodes well for the plant and Asheville as a whole.

"It's great," Tatum said. "It's not only great for Linamar, but for this area. Anytime a President of the United States comes to this area, it's a big deal. Anytime he pushes manufacturing it's great."

Tatum said he hopes the publicity the president's visit provided for Linamar

will strengthen the financial future of manufacturing to this state.

The president said the expense of leaving industry jobs overseas has become too great and the country must focus on renewing business that is both sustainable and rewarding.

"America is getting more competitive and more productive," Obama said. "(Manufacturers are) bringing back jobs from Japan. Ford is bringing jobs back from Mexico. After placing plants in other countries like China, Intel is opening its most advanced plant here in the United States. Apple is starting to make Macs in America again."

The president cited 500,000 new jobs created by American manufacturers in the last 3 years, a success spawned by government incentives and need for reduced costs of goods transportation.

**Ronnie Riddle, a machinist for Linamar,** said the creation of jobs in Asheville means more opportunities for families like his own.

"When the economy went bad a couple of years ago, a lot of people lost their jobs," Riddle said. "It's nice to be back in this business now."

Riddle, who has a machinist background, as well a two-year degree in business, lost his factory job a few years ago and turned to construction to make ends meet. His wife **Tonya Riddle** said the opening of the Linamar plant provided an excellent opportunity for their family and families in similar situations.

"It's been a blessing because the construction industry tanked and those jobs went away," Tonya Riddle said. "Since Linamar, we've been able to feed our family and go on vacation."

**Sean Coughlin, senior new media student at UNC Asheville,** agreed and said the president addressed powerful concerns in the Asheville community.

"I really liked what he had to say about jobs," Coughlin said. "My father was laid off at Arvado Digital Services in Weaverville."

Ronnie Riddle said the need for manufacturing seems more prevalent in this part of the state, where a majority of jobs used to be in manufacturing and factory-related labor.

The president said he hopes stories of success, like that of Linamar, encourages other businesses to areas previously reliant on manufacturing, as well as sustainable industry initiative in parts of the country that need to experience growth.

As of 2011, non-manufacturing com-

panies in Buncombe County, such as Ingles, the Biltmore Company and Mission Health and Hospitals, provided more jobs than industry manufacturers to this area.

Obama said new partnerships with schools like Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College could provide more properly skilled workers to fill manufacturing jobs and mark industry success for Buncombe and the surrounding counties.

"No job in America should go unfilled because somebody doesn't have the right skills to get that job," Obama said.

Currently, the UNC system is evaluating a plan that could generalize educational requirements at the collegiate level across the state. The plan is receiving heavy criticism at institutions such as UNCA, which provide a core curriculum based in the liberal arts and critical thinking, rather than job-oriented, skill-based training.

However, Riddle agreed with the president, saying partnerships with technical institutions like A-B Tech provide means to better skilled laborers and encourage insourcing and innovation in the states.

While the president reported growth in American industry, he noted the process will take negotiation on the part of both political parties.

"This is a job for everybody. This is not a Democratic thing or a Republican thing," Obama said.

Additionally, increases to manufacturing will take time and patience on behalf of the middle class, according to Obama.

"Now, I'm going to be honest with you. We're not going to bring back every job that has been lost to outsourcing and automation over the last decade," the president said. "(Manufacturing) has changed. That means you can just produce a lot more with fewer people."

However, economic growth and reform of wage policies are top priority for himself and Congress, the president said.

"We don't give up. We get up. We innovate. We adapt. We learn new skills. We keep going," Obama said. "I just want everybody here to know at this plant, everybody in Asheville, everybody in North Carolina and everybody all across the country - I want you to know as long as you're out here fighting everyday to better your lives, better the lives of your children, then I'll be back in Washington fighting for you."