

By Max Pizarro

SOMERSET – U.S. Rep. Rush Holt (D-12) wants to emphasize that while it's far from enough, the country and New Jersey are still producing – not losing – manufacturing.

The perennial Central Jersey rocket scientist with a penchant for hard-nosed campaigning appeared at ease when someone at Micro handed him a lab rat's chief trade tool in the lead up to today's tour of the plant.

"Safety goggles," Holt exulted.

"We won't be needing them," said Frank Semcer Jr., director of sales and the grandson of the man who in 1945 founded this precision parts company, which has grown despite the economic downturn.

"We employed 271 people here last year, and now we're up to 301," said Semcer, who was joined on the tour by his sister, Paige McCann, the factory's manufacturing coordinator; and their father, CEO and principal, Frank J. Semcer Sr.

This is a business that does \$80 million in sales annually with overseas accounts with American companies. One hundred and sixty workers are union, organized with the Teamsters.

They create six billion pieces per year.

"Our customers expect every one of them to be perfect," said Semcer Sr.

The high-tech Holt wants more emphasis on math and science education and training that Jersey lost over the years with the departure of businesses like Lionel, for example, from Hillside and others that traditionally cohered now defunct technical training schools. A champion of legislation to reward companies that invest in research, Holt said his reason for launching a week-long tour of manufacturing sites in his district is to highlight their presence in part to make his case to area schools.

“Manufacturing is still alive,” he said. “Would I call it well” - his voice trailed off.

“The country created 150,000 manufacturing jobs last year,” Holt said. “We, of course, need ten times that. But my point is to let people know that if you’re really handy at designing and machining, you’ll be in demand.”

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