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Josh Mandel hopes students will start taking a new look at the skilled trades.

"I believe we need to put shop class back in high school," the state Treasurer said Monday during a stop at Phoenix Technologies International in Bowling Green.

Mandel came by to present an inaugural "Ohio Strong" award at the company. The event was one of multiple stops planned by Mandel in the area, including Toledo, Findlay and Lima.

The Ohio Strong awards are intended to help recognize workers in manufacturing and the skilled trades across Ohio, and to raise public awareness to encourage people to pursue careers in those fields.

Prior to presenting the award to Henry Schworm of Phoenix - engineering manager and a 21-year employee at the company who started welding early in his life - Mandel noted that students today are largely told the only way to success is through a four-year degree. Such a degree is only one of the options available, he said, later noting figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics that 48 percent of young adults are employed in jobs that don't require a four-year degree - and as a result they are getting in debt for their education needlessly.

Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel (left) with Phoenix Technology's Henry Schworm, Engineering Manager for the company. (Photo: J.D. Pooley/Sentinel-Tribune)

"No one's really out there recognizing the worker," Mandel said.

He indicated he came to BG on Monday "because of the great trend of manufacturing here in the area" and because Wood County is known to have a highly-skilled workforce.

"We want to bring a heightened sense of pride and profile to people like Henry and others," said Mandel. He hoped that those recognized by the Ohio Strong awards - nomination applications can be found on the Treasurer's website - will inspire the upcoming generation.

Phoenix Technologies International, located at 1098 Fairview Ave., is "the global leader in recycled PET (rPET)," which is derived from plastic bottles, recycled, formed into pellets and used again to make a variety of plastic bottles.

"I think it's nice to be recognized for hard work," said Schworm, of Findlay, who received a four-year degree and is also a volunteer firefighter in Hancock county.

"I just encourage the young people to push forward and strive for a goal."

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