



Episode 14 Innovation & Growth (Bead Industries & Amodex) September 13, 2019

Martin Geitz: Welcome to Manufacturing Matters, a podcast sponsored by Simsbury Bank. Hello again, this is Martin Geitz, CEO and president of Simsbury Bank, bringing you another episode of Simsbury Bank's Manufacturing Matters, a podcast that brings important topics and expert guests to family business owners and small and medium sized businesses across our great state of Connecticut and beyond.

Martin Geitz: Today I am just delighted to be with Jill Mayer, CEO of Bead Industries. This is a fifth-generation family-owned manufacturing company, headquartered in Milford, Connecticut. And Beverly Dacey, who is president and CEO of Amodex. She is the second generation and has children, so the third generation is also involved with running that company based in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Welcome, delighted to have you here. I wonder if we could start by having each of you just describe your company, and what you do, and what you manufacture? And maybe Jill, do you wanna go first?

Jill Mayer: Sure. Um, so Bead is, uh, headquartered in Milford. And, uh, my great, great grandfather started the business with his son in 1914. My great, great grandfather helped patent and design the, um, first enclosed electric knife switch. So, and that led to, um, the electric light pole, that some people may still have in their cellar basements or closets.

Jill Mayer: And that the development of that led to, um, designing the machine to mass produce it; the chain had already been invented in Austria, but they hadn't figured out a way to mass produce it. And then, um, right around that time, world war was happening and there were overnight there was a national market for the chain.

Jill Mayer: We no longer manufacture the chain, but we, uh, we have a relationship with a former competitor in Asia that manufacturers the chain on our machines and we manage the quality and the customer service. Um, our other division is Bead Electronics. That's where we do all of our manufacturing, um, in Milford there, um, millions and millions of pins a year. Small little metal bits, but we used the same process that we used for the chain, which is called swaging.

Jill Mayer: And, uh, that's an alternative to screw machining and, um, stamping. And what it is, is it's, um, it's a unique cold forming metal process. So we're, we're, moving metal, not removing it the way that stamping would, so there's no scrap. And yes, so we make the electronic contact pins. Some of them are tubular or

hollow, but a hundred pounds of metal goes into the machine and a hundred pounds of metal comes out.

Jill Mayer: So we can be very custom and cost effective and quick, which you don't always hear in the same sentence. And our markets, our, um, automotive sensors, Um, specialty lighting, military, medical, we have, um, you know, connectors, and, um, telecom. So, and then we have our wholly owned subsidiary and Cheshire, which is a producer of commercial plumbing fixture trim, which is essentially everything underneath the sink, the p-trap, to elbows. And that's from the commercial market. So hotels and casinos and hospitals are, are where we sell our products.

Martin Geitz: Beverly, could you tell us a little bit about Amodex. What do you manufacturer and what's the story of its evolution?

Beverly Dacey: We are a kind of a single-purpose, uh, company, in that we manufacture stain-removal products. And, uh, the company evolved from a, a, a need in the 50s. My father started the company in 1958. At the time he was in the printing business, and he worked a lot with, you know, at that, at that time Bridgeport, of course, was a thriving industrial Mecca. And it had companies like Jill's as an account. And he did a lot of, um, services for the industrial sector in Bridgeport.

Beverly Dacey: What they realized at that time, they didn't have, uh, copy machines. That everything was done, mimeograph carbon in the offices, in the schools and everywhere. And, and it was dirty, ugly, gross stuff that would get on your hands, get on your clothes, you couldn't get it off. And so he and a chemist friend developed, uh, a formula to remove that. And that was the beginning of Amodex.

Beverly Dacey: And he sold in those days just B2B. That was his world. And it was, uh, he, it was national, but obviously in Connecticut because we were a thriving industrial Mecca, you know, he had more business than he, he knew what to do with. And then, um, over time, things changed, and buying trends changed, and industry changed, and things started to dry up. And he realized that, um, the product had far more varied application than just taking out ink and Mimeo and carbon in those things. And you fast forward, uh, to, to where we are now. The two fascinating things about his product are that the formula, because being a ... you ... some ... a product that you could use on skin necessitated that it'd be a soap formula.

Beverly Dacey: So we are the only soap stain remover in the world, and by virtue of that it's very mild. So I kind of laugh now and say that was green before green became trendy.

Beverly Dacey: Uh, the other cool thing about the product is that, most people probably don't know, but we get two types of stains. We either get oil-based stains or we get dye-based stains. Stain removal products out there will remove some of the oil-

based stains, others will remove some of the dye-based stains, but none do both. And none of them can be used on both washable and dry, cleanable fabrics. So turns out that Amodex has this unique niche, not only in terms of its formula, but by virtue of its formula, what it works on.

Beverly Dacey: And so consequently, if you're a mom, as Jill and I are and others particularly, and you're doing your laundry and you don't know what the heck your kids got on their clothes, which is very common. You don't have to worry about it because Amodex works on both. And, um, What really put the company on the map, uh, a while back was that we developed a relationship with Newell brands who makes Sharpie. And it turned out Amodex takes out sharpie and nothing takes out Sharpie.

Martin Geitz: Right. Permanent Markers afterall, right. (laughs).

Beverly Dacey: Correct. And it took a while for the marketing people at Newell to, um, to, to, to come to terms with partnering with a company that took out something that they claim was permanent.

Martin Geitz: Erasing the perfect marker. I love it. (laughs).

Martin Geitz: So you mentioned that the company started by focusing B2B, but along the way-

Beverly Dacey: It had to reinvent itself.

Martin Geitz: It had to reinvent itself and go B2C.

Martin Geitz: So when, when did that transition happen from just focusing on the business market to begin to focus on the consumer market too?

Beverly Dacey: It started in the 80s, it kind of shifted more into the 90s, and then by the 2000's, it, it, it blew up.

Beverly Dacey: There was no question that that's where it had to go.

Beverly Dacey: And particularly as, particularly as, as manufacturing was leaving the U.S., you know, that everything was drawing up, buying, buying patterns were changing.

Beverly Dacey: And the big operations really had no place for seeing what they considered, you know, single SKU, limited vendor companies, which we small businesses are.

Beverly Dacey: And so that really caught off the, uh, the, the lifeline.

Beverly Dacey: And I have to say though, if, if you have a good product, the, um, the internet has become your best friend because you don't have to talk about products anymore. People talk about it.

Martin Geitz: Well, Jill, um, maybe we talk a little bit about being the fifth-generation business owner, and how has your company been able to, you know, one of the sort of, old saws is that, you know, getting a family business to the second generation is, you know, often happens. Getting into the third generation is less likely to happen. And getting it beyond the third generation is really unlikely. And you're the fifth generation. How, how has your family, uh, been able to accomplish that?

Jill Mayer: Yeah, no. Yeah, no, I hear that odds are 500 to one of that.

Martin Geitz: (laughs). Wow.

Jill Mayer: But I'm incredibly lucky because, uh, when my father handed me the reign to the company, it was in great shape. And, um, our electronics division was growing. Our, all the environmental cleanup from the Bridgeport building was behind us. We'd established a board of directors who had been guiding my father through the succession planning process and then was mentoring me and we had and continue to have no debt.

Jill Mayer: So I'm grateful to have started with that solid foundation. I have colleagues who inherited their family business in the midst of financial difficulties or management issues, and I can't even imagine that. Um, so, uh, really it was the antiquated systems and the technology that stuck in my mind as something that was the most pressing issue. So, uh, you know, shortly after I came to the business, 12 years ago, we started, um, overhauling the technology and in the last few years we've implemented a new ERP system at both companies which has given us better visibility into our operations and has been really great. Also in my leadership role, we've had a number of retirements happen and continue to happen. So we'll be seeing more of that over the next few years, but as we prepare to lose talented people that who've worked at our company's, our company for decades, it's been my goal to continue the, the business, ensure the continuity of the business, not just in terms of skillset, um, but in terms of our culture. Um, so how I'm going to preserve the legacy of the family business is by continuing to run an honest, hardworking manufacturing company. Um, and ensure that people that we hire fit, um, the high integrity, high curiosity culture that we've created.

Martin Geitz: Mm. Terrific. Terrific. As you were describing, describing the company's, uh, um, evolution, uh, I couldn't help but, you know, uh, hear a theme of innovation. It sounds like you have over the years, found new ways to do things. You mentioned that you now have a manufacturer of the original product that's overseas, but you retain a, a role in making sure that it's the quality and so forth. And so you've you've changed over the years. W- how, how important is innovation been to the success of your company?

Jill Mayer: It's been critical, and I think, um, my dad's mantra was always, you know, adapt or die, you know, and when I'm sort of coming to terms with is innovate or die because you can adapt to the market and, and around you, but you have to also

keep moving forward. And we talk a lot about industry 4.0 and, um, what's coming down, um, the pipeline in terms of technology.

Jill Mayer: When I took the reins from my father, I was never told here, you know, here you go. Don't do anything drastic, don't break the company. Um, basically and ironically, that's what not to do, is to just sit there and let and kind of ride it out. Um, so it's always been a trial and error process for us. Let's try this new product, let's check out this new market. So I think there it's just an innovative culture that was already there that we're continuing. That, that's how I think you stick around.

Beverly Dacey: I would add to what Jill said.

Beverly Dacey: That I think the common denominator, she and I share in my story is polar opposite to hers in term, in terms of where the company was when I took it over. But I think that when you're family businesses, the value system of the family gets integrated into your company and it permeates everything around it to, to really be part of your mission. And that, that, that commitment to that kind of entrepreneurial spirit of innovation is really in your DNA. So as you're, as you know, it goes from generation to generation, it's something you don't even have to teach anyone because it just gets passed on through how we all interact with each other. And, and so the need for innovation isn't something that you, you have to talk about because everybody is always talking about it and recognizes how important it is to be constantly in that, in that mode.

Beverly Dacey: But also recognizing that you can't compromise where you are and what you're doing in any way that devalue your efforts and your, and your, and your, and your mission.

Beverly Dacey: Do you agree?

Jill Mayer: Exactly. Yeah.

Martin Geitz: And you're both talking about the culture of your organization. Is the culture of your company.

Beverly Dacey: Yes. It's a very unique, it's a very unique experience.

Martin Geitz: Yeah. Do you think about culture as you're leading the company every day? Do you think about how we do things and how we communicate and what our values are?

Beverly Dacey: Yes, every day.

Beverly Dacey: And particularly in my company because we are, um, a problem solver. So for example, when we moved to our new facility, we hemmed and hawed, something as simple as your phone system. And then we all decided, you know

what? Nothing makes us all crazier than when you call someplace and you have to press one, press seven, press six, you can't even get to where you're trying to go. You're not sure how to connect to who you need to connect to. And I would say the majority of our phone calls are customers calling in with issues. They're not sure if the product's suitable. And so we all decided that no, there will always be a voice that answers the phone and there will always be someone there to solve that person's problem immediately.

Beverly Dacey: And I think again, it's rooted in your, your, your whole value system.

Martin Geitz: Yeah. Remarkable. Remarkable. You both have spoken how important that is to your company.

Beverly Dacey: Well, I think especially today because we feel so disenfranchised. Like doesn't anybody care?

Martin Geitz: Jill, I understand that you have a great anecdote about, uh, how an investment in one piece of equipment can really create momentum for the company. Do you wanna share that with us?

Jill Mayer: Yeah. So, um, we recently purchased, uh, a new CNC machine. It's a vertical, um, machining center. And we had an old used one, um, that was really on its last leg, with just most like, like most other equipment in our factory. Um, but we were evaluating the purchase of a new one, and we heard about the manufacturing innovation fund, and in particular, the manufacturing voucher program, which is one piece of the fund. And, um, and I believe that's through the DECD, Bev will tell you more.

Jill Mayer: But, so we, we said, okay, you, with those funds, we could probably purchase this one, which had even more functionality. Um, and just was exciting. So, um, fast forward, we got the machine, we put it in our shop and it's, we put it in dead center in the middle of our plant. And it's this giant space shuttle in the middle, in the middle of all of these an- antiquated equipment. And it created all this buzz and excitement in our tool room and, and for our machine operators as well, especially for our millennial toolmaker apprentice and, and you know, so it was just great. And that got us excited about kind of re- revamping our tool room and overhauling our benches in our, um, cabinets and different things. And, and that's kind of dovetailed now into, all right, let's look at our next generation, um, machine, because we have about 80 presses and these are all from our old four-story building in Bridgeport.

Jill Mayer: Some of them refurbished chain machines into electronic machines and electronic, um, pin machines. And we've slapped computers and devices and all sorts of things. And it's literally lipstick on a pig at this point.

Jill Mayer: So, um, we have these 80 machines but only 12 to 15 are running at, at any given time. And if we had, um, smaller machines, we, we could have more of

them. And, um, we could have more running at the same time. So, um, by the end of this year, we hope to have a prototype for our next generation machine. And again, all of this really just dominoed from the CNC machine that we got this grant money from. So it was really exciting.

Martin Geitz: Yeah, that's a great story. That's a great story about how innovation and manufacturing processes is part of the key to the success as well. Have you had similar experiences, Bev?

Beverly Dacey: Well, as I was saying earlier, the evolution of Amodex is different from Bead, in that the transition from B to B, to B to C proved very challenging for my dad. So when I came in, the company was not thriving at all and it was, and my family and I decided together that we were going to take this opportunity and bring Amodex at the B to C level where it was at the B2B level, which meant a tremendous amount of, of, of change and innovation. And I, I call Amodex a restart up, 'cause it has a lot of fundamentals of a startup but it had a history.

Beverly Dacey: And you could use that history as your springboard. And I, and I say this to anybody, I think who's dealing with a company and the challenges of running companies because you can do that. It just takes a lot of create, create, creativity. And in our case where we were in Bridgeport, we had seriously outlived our life expectancy in the facility we're in as well as with our machinery. Same kind of problem Jill was having. But everything was sufficient.

Beverly Dacey: As long as it's sufficient, you know, it's, it's the old Yankee mindset. You don't replace it unless you have to. So we finally through, um, opportunities that the state was offering and, and lending opportunities in such, we were able to buy, to buy a new building and move, relocate, and we made the decision at that time that if we possibly could, the best thing was to replace all of our machinery because it really was old.

Beverly Dacey: Um, and, and, and today the technology is, is, is so far more advanced and the production capabilities that it would provide us were enormous. So we, And fortunately, one of my sons is an engineer, so he's perfectly wired for all this. And I said, if ever God knew what he was doing, he knew what he was doing by the way, he DNA'ed all my four kids because each one is very different in terms of talent and no one wants to do what the other one does. So there's no competition going on.

Beverly Dacey: Long story short, um, the, the, we were able through business express the state Business Express Program, which was a combination grant and, um, loan program, and the grant is a matching fund, so you had to have a dollar for dollar match in order to get that funding. And we were able to do that through a bank line of credit, which was spectacular. Because it helped us have all put together the, um, the patchwork quilt we needed to make it happen. And I think it shows the value of public-private collaboration and how that can help foster economic growth in our state. And I think we are a poster child for that because we were

able to utilize, um, both that opportunity and then the manufacturer's Innovation Fund Voucher Program opportunity to buy our new machinery.

Beverly Dacey: And as I've said to my family, you have to reinvent yourself every five years. To stay relevant. There's no question about it. And every third year you have to start getting yourself into that mindset. Okay, where are we going now? Where, what needs to be changed? And how are we gonna get there? But I think the, um, the pipe, public- private collaboration is pivotal to the kinds of growth that we can all aspire to.

Martin Geitz: So your company is really a beneficiary of, and a, and a sign of success of, uh, economic development programs that the state has.

Beverly Dacey: Well, I think, I think the critical factor in all this, and, and I suspect Jill would, I expect she would agree with me, is that you don't, you're not going to take these risks if you don't feel a 100% confident that you're going to achieve success.

Beverly Dacey: That, that you, these are not things you do cavalierly or casually. You do them with great purpose and that purpose yields great results. And that's the whole goal here. We wanna yield results so that the state can grow, the economy can grow, people can have jobs and we can all work together as a community to encourage, um, the kind of development we know we have out there for us.

Martin Geitz: Terrific. Jill?

Jill Mayer: I, well, I was just gonna also add, it's point was to reduce our lead time from two to three weeks down to two to three days.

Jill Mayer: So what happened is we used to do plating and sledding at our old facility in Bridgeport. So when, when we would outsource, um, uh, plating to outside vendors in the state, um, we would have to be waiting around and we would add that to our lead time. So, um, so having a shorter lead time helps with, with new customers and, um, customers expect faster, better now.

Jill Mayer: So, you know, that's in keeping with the model. So it was customer-driven of course, but, but, you know, a wonderful side benefit that was that it really brought up the morale and excitement of the future for our company.

Martin Geitz: Were, were any of the state economic development programs involved with your acquisition of the CNC machine or other investments that you've made?

Jill Mayer: Um, so the manufacturing voucher program, but there's also another piece of the Manufacturing Innovation Fund is the apprenticeship program. And that's been really helpful. Um, so we do that.

Martin Geitz: That's good. Terrific. Terrific. Um, I'm just curious, you know, so, so, you know, we hear a lot about, and, you know, it's been in the news recently that another large Connecticut-based company is gonna move its headquarters to Boston. So, uh, you know, one of the concerns that I think everyone has is that, you know, other businesses will leave the state for a variety of reasons. You've just talked about how the state has been, you know, supportive of your companies. Um, you know, you're both though national and international companies, so you're aware of what else is happening in the world and, and other places you could do your businesses. So what, what keeps you here, what keeps you in Connecticut?

Jill Mayer: Um, so I, I don't wanna speak for Bev, but what we are of a similar nature.

Jill Mayer: In that, you know, the, the grants and the funding is great and I will take advantage of it if it's there. I think that we probably wouldn't need those grants and fundings if, um, if, you know, Connecticut was a more business friendly state.

Martin Geitz: Sure. Sure.

Jill Mayer: So, um, so while those things are helpful, um, you know, if I had to choose it would probably not, maybe not needing the aid. I don't know, Bev?

Beverly Dacey: I, you know, for me personally, um, like my personality by nature is that I'm persistent. And, um, in the early 80s, I had the experience of living in communist Romania for a year.

Martin Geitz: No kidding. Wow.

Beverly Dacey: Which was an enormous education, and it enlightened me so much to what opportunities we do have in this country and we can do whatever we want if we put our minds to it. Um, living there and living in other parts of the country. I mean, I came back to Connecticut, I lived in Massachusetts for a time and chose to come back to Connecticut to raise my, my children. And I think Connecticut is a spectacular state with enormous numbers of assets that are not, that are under-utilized. And we business owners are perceived as, as boogeyman and we're not. If anything, I think we are, um, amazing partners within our community and we love our community.

Beverly Dacey: And when we were, when we weren't thinking of moving, I will be honest and tell you that we thought long and hard about leaving. And then the persistent per- personality in me kicked in and said, "If you leave and everybody else leaves after all these years of you being a Connecticut-based, Bridgeport-based business, what's going to be left?"

Beverly Dacey: And that was another reason why I also decided to devote some time to this fund, was to become an ambassador for the state to other businesses and to develop relationships that I saw my father had in the early years. It made a huge

impression on me when I was a child, how he would be going around Bridgeport and he'd go out to the store or go do an errand. And Everybody knew everybody and they all helped each other. And all these businesses shared their talents with each other.

Beverly Dacey: And that's how they all became extraordinarily successful. And I thought, wait a minute, why aren't we doing that? Well, one of the reasons we're not doing it is because there aren't enough of us. So we need to all partner and we need to all support each other. And I think then that becomes, um, a, a, beautiful, becomes a big, uh, PR tool for the state, to see that what's going on in the dynamics.

Beverly Dacey: The other piece of it too is that when I took over the company, it was just before the recession. And needless to say that really was a gut punch. Um, because I was watching a lot of my suppliers closing up and, and then I'm thinking, "Oh boy, what do I do now? I don't wanna be last man ... I wanna be last man standing, not first man out." So I made the decision to source all of my materials from U.S. suppliers, and I made that decision two fold.

Beverly Dacey: One, because I wanted to support other small businesses in the country who I knew were struggling just the way we were through the recession. And then I also said I never want to be beholden to overseas suppliers, because I thought I could see that could become a dangerous precipice, particularly with intellectual property. So, um, I did that.

Beverly Dacey: And fast forward, here we are today. People facing some really serious challenges with cybersecurity, with IP, with no access to resources, supply chain.

Beverly Dacey: And, um, what we have here in Connecticut and what we have here in New England we have here in the states is, uh, a vast amount of resources that I think we are beginning to now finally, retap.

Beverly Dacey: And Connecticut, particularly for exporting is a spectacular location. It's very easy to get your goods out of here and it's very cost effective. Again, though, I think some of these, some of these assets are being overlooked by the state and if they could work with us instead of against us, I think we would see tremendous growth.

Beverly Dacey: Do you agree?

Jill Mayer: Well, yes, definitely. Um, with, with, with things that aren't, aren't being highlighted for sure. I would also just add that, um, you know, we wouldn't be in business today if we didn't treat our employees wonderfully. And our employees are so good to us and we reciprocate. So some of the, you know, the, the minimum wage, which we have nobody that's at under \$15 anyway, but what, what they'll probably think is, well, if this unskilled brand new person right into the workforce is making 15, then why am I making 17 and 18? I should

be making way more. Um, so that's how the, the, the minimum wage hike over four years hurts us.

Jill Mayer: Not, not that we're not already paying our people, I think a very competitive wage. And then same thing with the paid, um, Family Medical Leave Act. We have wonderful disability. We have parental leave even for dads. We have, we have just, uh, I think a really competitive, really admirable benefits package. I'm gonna have to dial that down.

Beverly Dacey: Well, what bothered me the most about the, the act was that it removed from us as employers, the ability to be flexible, which we as small business owners that I think is the key to everything that makes us different and better, is that your employees are more than just somebody you give a paycheck to.

Beverly Dacey: And they're people who you care about, they care about you, and everybody works as a team. And this idea that somehow we're not, we're taking advantage of the employees, um, is, is, is just ludicrous. It's the other way around. So now by legislating, they're making it harder, not easier for us to give our employees what we want to give them, because they're going to come in here and just say, "Well, this is what the law says. This is what I want. And that's that." Rather than saying, "Hey, let's figure this out, what's gonna work for you? What's gonna work for us? We want everything to, to, to flow." And it always does.

Beverly Dacey: And now, particularly with the issues that we all know exist in the workplace with regard to millennials and how they seek flexibility. They have actually in my mind, undermined one of the better resources the state could have been offering the millennials to make it more attractive to come to Connecticut.

Beverly Dacey: Now it's going to be the other way around because now we can't have that flexibility anymore. It's been legislated.

Jill Mayer: It seems like that their hearts are in the right place, but there's all these unintended consequences that if they could just get with the business community and understand it, I think that they would have a better solutions.

Martin Geitz: We'd all benefited from that. Absolutely.

Beverly Dacey: Well, and I know in our case, um, I sat down with my family because now, you know, it's an added tax. We have the pension requirement, we now have the family ... we have the minimum wage. All these added burdens placed on us, all tied to hiring. And so we're just going to be bringing in temp help. That that is the, you know, financially in the best interest of the company. Because in the end, if the company isn't thriving, no one, no one benefits.

Martin Geitz: Correct. Yeah. And if the company isn't thriving, there are no jobs and there is no economic growth.

Beverly Dacey: Correct. So, so these are jobs. So what they didn't realize is these are job busters.

Jill Mayer: Yeah. That, that, but through natural selection, if you think about it works itself out. If you're a crummy employer and you don't pay your people well, and there's a shortage of labor, you're going out of business because they're gonna work over at this company. So, you don't have to put up these mandates. No one will work there anyway. Or you'll get really unskilled labor and the company will go down the tubes. So all of those things, I feel like would work themselves out.

Martin Geitz: Yeah, absolutely. Well, and you think about it, we're at historically low unemployment rates. So, just to your point, there's a job for everyone who wants a job and wants to work. And, and, uh, in today's world, which actually maybe is a nice segue into workforce and workforce development. And, uh, you know, uh, Connecticut has a, a community college system, has a state university system, system, and, of course, UConn. And I'm wondering how important is the state's investment as well as, of course, high schools and, and, uh, you know, secondary schools that are all, uh, operated at the municipal level. But how important is the state's focus on workforce development to your success today and in the future?

Jill Mayer: Um, I think it's, it's vital. I think, um, my father was, um, very active, um, um, visiting vo-tech schools in the area. He was involved in the NHMA, the New Haven Manufacturers Association, and META the Manufacturers, Education and Training Alliance. And both of those organizations help try to pair companies with, um, local technical high schools or advanced manufacturing centers at different community colleges. Um, for our hundredth anniversary, my father set up an endowment for students at the AMC, and at Housatonic Community College. And that's where we found our previous and our current toolmaker apprentice.

Jill Mayer: Um, and we think training, um, those, those kids, um, is how we're gonna grow and innovate as well, because, um, you just, you can't find the toolmakers anymore. Um, you know, we're all fighting over the few that are left. But, um, we also, um, host student tours several times a year trying to help dispel the myth of the dark, dirty and dangerous.

Jill Mayer: And, um, I mean even if our, some of our machines are a bit antiquated, it's bright, it's clean, and our, we have happy people behind those machines working them. So I think that, you know, we open our doors and it's, it's our, it's how we can do our part to help kind of clear that. But, um, we can't do that without partnering. We had, um, Emmett O'Brien technical high school, Steve Laski, um, kids come and, um, I think it's absolutely important to partner with the, with the students and all, because it's, it's the, it's about the community Bev was talking about earlier. Um, if we want these kids to, to stay in the state, um, let's show them, let's, let's open up the door and show them what's inside. I think.

Beverly Dacey: But it's an interesting question and it's something I've been thinking about a lot in the last couple of weeks because an economist colleague friend of mine and I are going are writing a paper on apprentice programs in the U.S. and what went, what went wrong with regard to workforce and we're giving it in Korea and a couple of weeks. And it's given me an opportunity to really delve into a lot of what's, um, going on internationally, nationally and locally. And at the center of it is the realization that this focus on, um, high school education that is college-bound, led us down a, um, limiting, limiting path.

Beverly Dacey: And consequently, the employers, particularly in manufacturing, were not being tapped with regard to what their future needs were going to be. And the simultaneous to the demise of the vo-tech schools and vocational training in the comprehensive high schools. So you had the perfect storm for, and then you have, you know, baby boomers retiring. We were having the perfect storm for a dearth of a population to come in and fill all these voids.

Beverly Dacey: In the meantime, we have a lot of young people who have tremendous talent that isn't rooted in being "college bound."

Beverly Dacey: And so, at the core of paperwork writing is actually for me the change in lexicon and not referring any more to work force development as such. But calling it career development.

Beverly Dacey: That today things are moving at such a rapid pace. The choices you make with regard to the road you put yourself on for a pathway for employment is a career. It's not "work."

Beverly Dacey: And the manufacturing sector itself is so dynamic. It's changing constantly and as you said, you're the, these companies are innovating so quickly that, um, they are as attractive in many ways as, um, Silicon Valley with regard to the technology, technological advancements.

Beverly Dacey: But we don't have the people prepared to do that kind of dynamic work and that now we're trying to play catch up. And in Connecticut, in particular, because we have always been a little bit snobby about making sure, you know, our kids go to college, um, that we were losing sight of, um, that big population of young people who had other interests and who now are, we're finally putting the wheels in motion to address and to try, to try to create some pathways. But critical to that is working in partnership with the companies to make sure the skills that these young people are securing are relevant.

Jill Mayer: And that's where the, I think the manufacturing pipeline initiative that started over in the eastern region of Connecticut, um, they're mapping that to the different regions because basically it's, each region has its own unique set of needs of the skills. And so rather than just a one size fits all throughout the state, they say, okay, this region is a, you know, metal forming.

Jill Mayer: Um, this region is, um, you know, welding. So what they're trying to do is make sure that, um, they're talking to the business owners about what they need and then the working together with the teachers to create the curriculum, because what's happening is the vo-tech students will come through and will say, well, where's their basic, you know, micrometers skills, where's the fractions? Where's the, you know, how are, you know, they need to at least have some, some knowledge of the basics before I can put them in my factory. It's a safety concern.

Beverly Dacey: And as an, as we know, As public education over the last couple of decades has, has, has evolved, we know that our young, young graduates are lacking in what are called soft skills. And that is, is as problematic as their technical skills.

Beverly Dacey: And the critical thinking, the problem solving, all of that. And now I think this is forcing the public education world to really re-examine what it is that's going on in the classroom so that both, both arms are working in partnership to, to assure that these young people will be able to meet the needs of what's going forward. So they have careers.

Beverly Dacey: So that, so that they can, they can continue to stay involved and, um, and it's, it's, it's a, it's a big challenge. Uh, you look at other parts of the, of the world, Switzerland, and Germany, and New Zealand, they, they have this thing nailed. And they did for a long time. And we, I think we diverged.

Beverly Dacey: In part too, because so much manufacturing left our country. I know, I can tell you being on this fund, I'm the non-aerospace member of the board. And so I'm the only person who has, you know, consumer who represents small business in a consumer product sector.

Beverly Dacey: So I'm kind of odd man out, and I've always been, as one of my fellow board members, he kind of, he calls me the disruptor, because nine times out of 10 the conversation gets back to what I call A and D. Aerospace and Defense, because that's at the core of Connecticut's economy. However, I think that that's also led to some of the problems we have because we have, and, and places like Pratt have certainly invested in apprentice training and combat training and they because they've had to. And because the, the, the national, you know, our federal government recognizes that aerospace and defense are our strategic sectors for our country, that they have been drivers. But now that driver has expanded our awareness to many more sectors that have those needs, like yours and mine that are equally as, as demanding, if not more so. And so what do you do? Because you barely have the infrastructure in place for A and D and then what do you do now to segue that to the other sectors.

Martin Geitz: Yeah. But do you need to solve that problem. And, you know, we in prior a manufacturing matter is broadcasts or podcasts, we've had guests who, uh, you know, from the community college system, Jim Lombella from Asnuntuck Community College. We've had, uh, other manufacturers who are in businesses that are actually more supporting, uh, consumer products, uh, like Joe Vrabely,

Joe Vrabely's company up from Waterbury. And everything he was speaking about, uh, you know, the folks on the education side are, are recognizing the issues that you're talking about. So I feel as though there is sort of a coming coalescence of, all right, we've all identified the problem, now let's really work harder on getting to the right solutions.

Beverly Dacey: Well, I am extremely excited, personally. Um, and had seen a need a few years ago when I first got on the MIF board with the fact that we had so many silos in Connecticut. And we're a teeny little state. And, you know, I kept thinking, oh my gosh, we're, we're all beating each other up or tripping over each other. We're not using our resources as effectively. This makes no sense. And this year, and this isn't to toot their horn, but I'm, I'm just so thrilled because I, I can't believe they got this done. But CBIA in conjunction with CONNStep, in conjunction with this, um, group that she's a part of, advocated with the legislature and the governor to get a manufacturing Czar, and you know, it's tough as the state economy is right now, the fact that their um, their, their, their request was so well crafted and that they really had the, the d- data and the information to back then the claim for the need, it, it's being funded and I think that's going to be pivotal to changing the direction the state's in because we're now going to have a central resource through which all this stuff can funnel. Instead of all these silos.

Jill Mayer: Yeah. Bev is talking about the CMC, the Connecticut Manufacturing Collaborative, and it's like nine different, um, groups and associations throughout the entire state that are coming together. And in- initially when it was being put together, you know, people were trying to make sure that, you know this, I do this really well and I do this really well, and don't tell me how to do it. But in the end it was, we were all, there were a few things that we were all doing separately, but we're working towards the same goal. And we said, "Let's just work on that together."

Jill Mayer: And that's why it got really super hyper-focused on needing a manufacturing Czar. And, um, it was just really incredible to see that- people work together.

Beverly Dacey: I, I just am so excited for what they accomplished. And what it speaks to is when you do have a collaboration like that and you get, you get the private sector, um, working to address what you see is, is a crisis in your state and in the public sector, so to speak, what you, how you can move mountains. And this is, I think going to be a game changer for Connecticut because they're going to get the insight they've never had before.

Martin Geitz: Yeah. That's great to hear. And, and, and, uh, you know, in particular because you're right, the, uh, aerospace and defense sector, you know, Pratt, Electric Boat, Sikorsky, they get the headlines a lot more than all of the other manufacturing companies who are making very successful products in all kinds of industries, like your two companies. Uh, and, and they don't get, you don't get nearly the attention yet you're a vital part of our economy and, and a vital part of what makes Connecticut, uh, what it is today. Any final thoughts as we,

uh, wrap up on the program about how we need to continue to move forward as a state or how your companies will continue to be successful?

Beverly Dacey: For me, I think it's a matter of, um, all of us making sure that we're always interacting together. Uh, not only both, uh, businesses with business to business relationships, but I think also with, uh, within our community and with the state. Our legislators, um, I know they understand the, the, the, the challenges we have, but they are somewhat beholden to their voters. But what I think they don't understand is that we are as committed to helping their voters as they are. And that what if we can get past that mindset, we would see Connecticut be the Connecticut it was in the 60s, because that was Connecticut then. And the resources then become much greater both at the private and public within the private and public sector.

Beverly Dacey: At this point now it's so heavily, um, uh, driven and, and, and, and managed by the public sector that it's, it's too much a burden to carry, and we need to shift that, but, but you can't unless the resources are there.

Jill Mayer: And I would just add too to that, um, shifting the mindset is also a critical piece to that would be, um, you know, changing kind of the negative recording of, um, and, and finding a positive side to it. I mean, we talked earlier about community and, you know, getting involved and, um, not just giving back, but, but reaching out and, and I know that we've all been kind of disenfranchised by the whole, by the whole thing. But I think that if, if we work together and we work on the same issues together, and, um, there's more of a comradery there, I think it's, we can get through it.

Jill Mayer: And I really, I really do. Despite some of the things that have been happening, happening lately, I think that we can get through it if we work together and we stay positive.

Beverly Dacey: Well, I, I get very frustrated sometimes because I have a lot of friends who've left Connecticut.

Beverly Dacey: Um, but When all is said and done and you ask them how it is, where they live, given the choice, they'd be back here.

Beverly Dacey: And that's, I think the greatest tragedy in all this. Is that it's an economically-driven circumstance and one that is bringing us to a downward spiral. While those other states are thriving from our loss. And I think we, we can and we will shift it, but it has, you know, the time is here. It's now.

Martin Geitz: Yeah. Yeah. Well, and part of it is, you know, Connecticut as a state, all of us in Connecticut for some reason we have this unfortunate trait of seeing the glass as half empty instead of half full. Whenever something negative happens, we've got to go, wallow in it and, "Oh, aren't we awful." In fact, in this morning's Hartford Courant, there's an article on the front page by one of the business

reporters talking about STEM education in the state and, uh, you know, how woefully behind we are. And it quotes Joe Brennan from CBIA and so forth. And it's a very negative article.

Martin Geitz: Yet, a month ago or two months ago, uh, we were up at UConn, at the School of Engineering, at the New Innovation Partnership Center, interviewing, uh, a student who is a graduating senior from UConn, who was one of, uh, 300 students who had partnership projects with companies in Connecticut that helped the business solve a problem, educated the students, and really prepared them for the workforce.

Martin Geitz: So I think, you know, we've got a lot of good things that are happening that we're not doing a very good job of shining a light on. And I don't wanna, you know, pretend that we don't have challenges. God knows we do, but there are some really good things going on, uh, whether it's UConn's engineering school or whether it's, you know, advanced manufacturing at Asnuntuck or Tunxis, or other places and, and, and now adding to that, the work that you all are doing as manufacturers getting together and, and moving the ball forward.

Beverly Dacey: Ac- Actually, it's interesting you bring that up because one of my personal, um, observations of, I think one of the most underrated jewels right now in this state is the Fairchild Wheeler Magnet School in Bridgeport. That school is, I, I think the blueprint to Connecticut STEM education. They've really got it nailed down. They're extraordinarily successful. The way their curriculum is designed is exactly what everyone's talking about, which is employer-driven. What are the needs the employers are going to have in the next 10 to 15 years? So that curriculum stays relevant.

Beverly Dacey: And it is, it is, it is an astonishing place in the success ratio of that. For the students that are graduating from there, which is, you know, I think, I think 65% or 70% of the students are from Bridgeport, is amazing. And we don't talk about that, and we're not, you were not working with the, with that enough.

Jill Mayer: And I think it's, it's on us as manufacturers, we have as much of a responsibility to talk about what is working because we have plenty to say about what's not working.

Jill Mayer: But if we don't speak about what is working and we get frustrated if that goes away. So, um, we need to do both.

Martin Geitz: Yeah. That's a great note to end on. I'd like to thank you both, Jill Mayer, CEO of Bead Industries, and Beverley Dacey, president and CEO of Amodex, for joining us today. I'm Martin Geitz, president and CEO of Simsbury Bank. And thank you all for listening into Simsbury Banks' Manufacturing Matters.

Jill Mayer: Thank you.

Beverly Dacey:

Thank you.