



# JOSH MANDEL

## STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

By Elizabeth Lundblad | News-Herald

Nick Valletta has worked at Slabe Machine Products for the past quarter century, holding many positions over the years but always doing a job he enjoyed and earning a good steady living to provide for his family.

Valletta's career is indicative of many long-term, motivated employees at small to mid-size locally-owned manufacturers, progressing through the ranks as he matured into the field and growing up with the company.

Starting as a machinist, Valletta said he then went into tool making and eventually became a supervisor in that area. From there he trained to become a CNC machinist foreman and programmer.

On March 31, Valletta was given an Ohio Strong Award by Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel. The Treasurer's Office recently launched the "Ohio Strong" campaign to highlight men and women who excel in manufacturing and the skilled trades.

"To me, I love being a machinist. I love working with the people and working with my hands," Valletta said.

During his presentation to a group of workers at Slabe, 4659 Hamann Parkway in Willoughby, Mandel said when his office called Slabe asking about employees the owners made it clear that each of its employees was worth recognizing.

"Without employees like ours, I don't know where we'd be," said Chris Slabe, who owns SMP with his brother, Brendan.

The company was started by Edward E. Slabe Sr., Chris and Brendan's grandfather, in 1939. His son, Edward E. Slabe Jr. took over in the mid-'70s and oversaw the company until his sons took over.

Sitting down with Mandel and The News-Herald after the award presentation, Slabe said he's seen a decrease in interest in manufacturing from younger generations.

With some traditional schools cutting wood shop, Slabe said he wondered if high school students are even told about the opportunities the skilled trades offer.

"I don't think they understand what they could make, I mean, our machinists are making 50, 60 thousand dollars (a year). Granted, they've been here 10 years," he said. "But they're setting up half-million dollar machines. They're running Ferraris, basically, and they don't get that."

For his part, Valletta, a Mayfield Heights resident, said he sees fewer and fewer young workers entering the trades.

"A lot of young people, they don't want to be in manufacturing anymore," he said. "Everybody wants to be an engineer, everybody wants to be making the big bucks. To tell you the truth, my family is happy. We make a decent living. It's an honest living."



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When he received the award, Valletta thanked his co-workers and Slabe.

"Thanks to all of you. It's an honor, thank you very much," he said.