

# Lehigh Valley Provides a Meaningful Setting for President Biden's Message on Bolstering U.S. Manufacturing



President Biden delivers his Made in America message July 28, 2021 at Mack Trucks. (Photo/Don Cunningham)

By By Nicole Radziewich Mertz

LEHIGH VALLEY - President Joe Biden kicked off his "Made in America" initiative Wednesday in Lehigh Valley where he toured the assembly plant at Mack Trucks, a storied manufacturer that exemplifies the country's industrial might.

Surrounded by truck cabs and Old Glory, Biden chose the Lehigh Valley, with one of the strongest manufacturing economies in the Northeast, to call for changes he believes will increase American-made components in federal purchases and support the domestic production of goods critical to national and economic security. The initiative would make the most robust changes to the Buy American Act in 70 years, he said.

"It's very appropriate the president came to Lehigh Valley to deliver his Made in America message," said Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation (LVEDC) President & CEO Don Cunningham, who attended the visit. "Not only does the region have a long and rich history of manufacturing, but it also remains the cornerstone of our economy. Manufacturing is in the region's DNA with more than 700 manufacturers and 33,000 workers making everything from guitars to medical devices to Mack Trucks. The Lehigh Valley proves every day that America still makes things."

Among the initiatives Biden called for Wednesday would help Lehigh Valley manufacturers. Biden said new legislation would lead to American-made semiconductor chips, a key component in Mack Trucks that was in short supply because of pandemic-related disruptions. He called for climate-driven innovations, like electric vehicles, and pointed to Mack Trucks' work with zero-emission garbage trucks.

Biden also said his plan would help buy products from companies like OraSure Technologies, a Bethlehem-based employer that produces a rapid COVID-19 test. He cited OraSure as □

"Our manufacturing future, our economic future, our solutions to the climate crisis are all going to be made in America, creating good jobs," Biden told the crowd during his 30-minute speech. "That's what it means to build back better. We come out of this economic crisis, the worst since the Depression, stronger than when we went in."

Biden delivered his message in Lehigh Valley, ranked among the busiest industrial markets in the country because of its location in the Northeast market and talent supply. From Suncup Juice to Sharp Packaging, industrial users in 2020 added 3.3 million square feet of inventory in Lehigh and Northampton counties, and another 6.5 million square feet were under construction at the end of the second quarter this year.

And more prospects are in the pipeline, according to LVEDC. Twenty-one of the 30 industrial prospects considering moving to or expanding in the Lehigh Valley are manufacturers.

Lehigh and Northampton counties tout about 700 manufacturers that employ a tenth of the region's work force. Before the pandemic, the Lehigh Valley added 5,000 manufacturing jobs in five years. The metro region that includes Lehigh Valley produced a \$7.1 billion output, making it the 52nd largest manufacturing economy in the nation.

Mack Trucks has been a proud part of that manufacturing story for more than a century. Mack was launched in 1900 with the production of the first bus in New York City



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