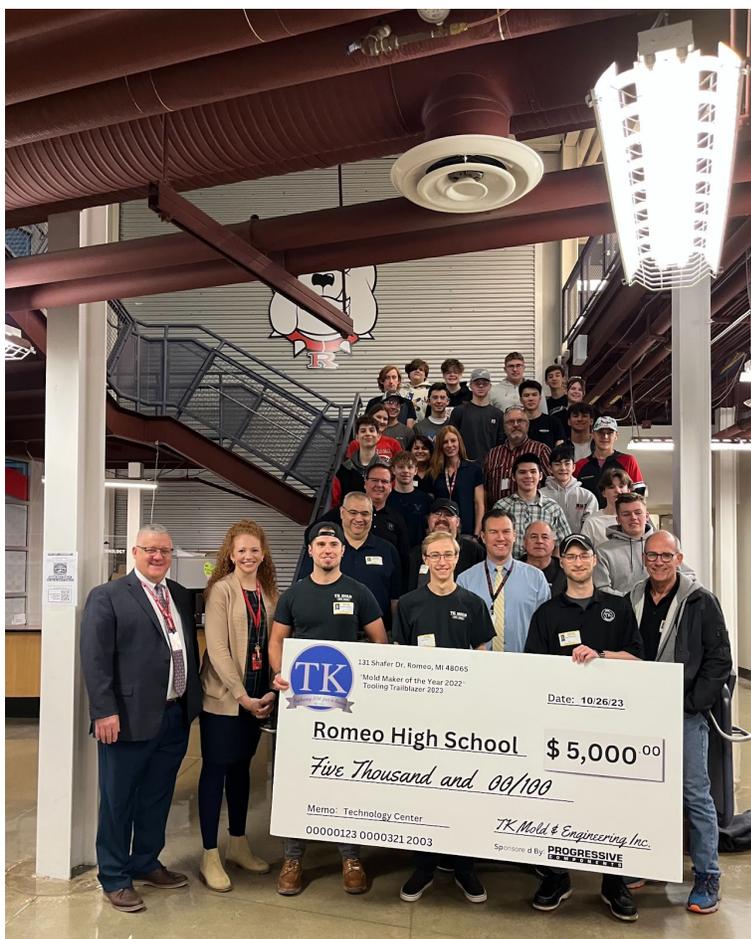




**ROMEO
COMMUNITY
SCHOOLS**

GOOD NEWS ACROSS 'R' DISTRICT

November 8, 2023



Building future trailblazers

Owen Pioch, a 2022 Romeo High School graduate, found his calling when he was still a student in the Academy of Design, Engineering and Manufacturing.

Owen enrolled in work-based learning, spending half of his day at RHS – a lot of it in the machine shop – and the remainder working for TK Mold & Engineering, an industry leader in designing, building and manufacturing plastic injection molds.

Recommended for the job by a teacher, Owen also spent time assisting with the machine classes as part of an independent study.

Upon graduating, he went to work

full-time for TK Mold as a machinist operator. He is currently an apprentice working toward a journeyman's certificate.

“He will learn a skill he can do for the rest of his life,” said TK Mold President Thomas Barr, adding that the company pays for Owen’s education. “It’s onwards and upwards from there.”

Barr, who owns the company with his wife, Krista (the initials “TK” are for their first names), took a similar route when he was Owen’s age.

“Not everybody has that university path,” he said. “I’m a product of an apprenticeship program and an entrepreneurial dream. I pursued that and even without a four-year degree I was able to go through an apprenticeship school at night and work during the day.”

That entrepreneurial dream flourished and the company, in business since 2003, has won back-to-back awards from the American Mold Builders Association – Mold Builder of the Year in 2022 and Tooling Trailblazer of the Year in 2023.

With each award comes a \$5,000 endowment to be donated to an educational institution to promote continued education in mold building. TK Mold chose Romeo High School as its beneficiary for two years running. The additional funding will support renovations to the shop along with new paint, lights, equipment, and machinery repair and replacement.

Tom and Krista Barr, along with other company representatives, came to Romeo High School on November 2 to present the check. Architectural design teacher Evva Dossin, who serves as the CTE and Work Based Learning Coordinator, applauded the company not just for its financial support, but also for exposing students to the benefits of a career in manufacturing and providing opportunities for them to work on real-world projects.

For example, in 2021, RHS students designed and developed an iPad holder with TK Mold’s assistance. Students visited the facility, where they worked with company employees to make more than 2,000 iPad holders that were distributed to all five elementary schools in the district. This year plans are underway to design and manufacture a cell phone holder, with students involved in the process from start to finish.

In an industry constantly evolving with new innovation and technology, Barr said there are even more opportunities for young people to advance and excel than there were in his day. Another benefit to a career in manufacturing, in his view, are the tangible results.

“We’re making something every day,” he said. “You get to see what you’re making – the fruits of your labor. It’s pretty cool.”

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