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FEATURED EDITOR'S PICK

Manufacturing Week field trip gives New Tech students career insights

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Oct 7, 2025

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Artist Gordon Huether talks about some of his work with students from New Tech High School who visited his gallery on a field trip for National Manufacturing Week on Friday, Oct. 3.

Nick Otto/Register

One of the priorities at New Technology High School in Napa is to expose high school students to every possible path they can take after graduation.



This includes requiring students to take at least three college-level classes while in high school, completing an internship, and maintaining an overall focus on real-world applications in every class. For the last three years, it has also meant a group of

students spending a day on a Vine Bus traveling through Napa, visiting manufacturing businesses that range from bottle etching to embroidery.

“A lot of the kids we choose to offer this to are students who have expressed an interest in doing something with their hands,” said New Tech Counselor Laura Lewis.

On Friday, Oct. 3, 26 seniors and juniors from New Tech embarked on this year’s field trip, which serves as a local kick-off to National Manufacturing Week. The week is a national effort to celebrate the contributions of the manufacturing sector, showcase modern manufacturing and promote career opportunities.

The high schoolers were joined by Lewis and Napa Economic Development Coordinator Jennifer Owen, who came up with the idea for the field trip three years ago. Owen told the Register that the field trip is in service of the Napa Makes Initiative, with the goal of opening students’ eyes to the possibility of a local manufacturing career.

The first stop of the morning was at Gordon Huether Studio, home of the prolific artist who has made a career in large-scale, site-specific public installations.

“A lot of you straddle the art and tech worlds,” Owen told the students while introducing Huether. “That’s what Gordon’s work really personifies.”

Huether led the students on a tour of the 12,000-square-foot studio, showing them the entire creative process, from a tiny concept model to the final product. When asked by a student, Huether said the quickest a project takes is a year from idea to installation.

While on the tour, Huether pointed out a sign above his desk that simply says “No.” It’s important, Huether said, to get used to rejection, with the artist estimating that about six of every 20 applications reach fruition.

He also walked through many of his works of public art located in Napa, such as the city’s 9/11 Memorial.

“If nobody understands it, and everyone is just annoyed by it, it’s not a successful piece of public art,” Huether said.

Asked to give any words of advice to the students, Huether encouraged them to read a lot and experience what life has to offer.

“It’s important to learn by doing and learn by failing,” he said.

At the second stop of the day, Paul Hanson of California Etching welcomed students to the legacy Napa business that creates etched and screen-printed bottles and glasses, primarily for the wine industry. Hanson and his wife, Elena, purchased the business almost three years ago.

He told the high schoolers about his background in the automobile industry, working for companies like Bentley and Tesla. When asked, he mentioned that he earned a degree in industrial design and engineering, a broader path rather than hyper-focusing on a particular niche.

Before touring the production area of the business, students received a firsthand look at the design process from Juan Carlos Bueno, who demonstrated how initial concept sketches from a client are transformed into images in Adobe Illustrator and then into stencils used to create the final product.

One student asked him about the size of the bottles and whether it was more difficult to engrave the smaller bottles. Bueno responded that they start with the smaller bottle designs because the details are often simplified.

“It’s easier to deal with when you scale up rather than doing it in reverse,” Bueno added.

Lewis later remarked that she loved the Adobe Illustrator element of Bueno’s discussion since many of the students are actively learning the program at school.

The students then took a tour of the production facility, where they saw the entire etching process. While waiting for their turn to tour the smaller areas, students were encouraged to create their own bottle designs, with a winner randomly selected by Owen receiving a real version of their creation.

“I’m sorry to say that there’s no wine in it,” Hanson joked. “I don’t think we’re allowed to do that.”

Hanson also left the students with some career advice.

“When you get to a point where you’re looking for jobs, it’s less about what you know and more about your attitude and expressed interest,” he said encouragingly.

After a lunch break, the field trip concluded with visits to Nova Group and Embroidery Zone.

Owen said that each year she is touched by every business being enthusiastic participants who are willing to tell their stories and give advice to the next generation.

“Today shows these kids a different path and a different purpose,” she added. “If none of them stay in Napa and work manufacturing jobs, at least we ingrained that potential path into them.”

Lewis and Owen both encouraged any Napa manufacturing businesses willing to host students next year to reach out, stating that they are always looking for new stops on the field trip.

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