VENTURA, Calif. - The jobs of the future might not require a college degree, but they will require plenty of training and expertise, in areas that today are often neglected by both schools and students.

That was one of the recurring themes of "Jobs For Our Future," a forum held Thursday at Ventura College on the resurgence of the manufacturing industry in the United States and in Ventura County.

The college and the city of Ventura hosted, and the speakers included Gov. Jerry Brown's top economic development adviser; the CEO of the Santa Paula-based grower and developer Limoneira; and John Ratzenberger, best known as Cliff Claven on Cheers or as a voice in every Pixar movie, but also the host for five years of "Made in America," a Travel Channel documentary series.

Ratzenberger has focused lately on nonprofit work that promotes American manufacturing and addresses the country's shortage of skilled workers. When he hosted "Made in America," he said, he ran into business after business that couldn't find qualified welders, machinists and other skilled laborers.

"We're running out of people to make things and build things," Ratzenberger said. "People have an idea that manufacturing jobs are like a '30s movie, where you're going to lose an arm or a leg or get black lung disease, and that's just not the case."

Ratzenberger's appreciation for blue-collar work goes back to his childhood in the factory town of Bridgeport, Connecticut. He became a journeyman carpenter, and learned, he said, "never assume you're smarter than the guy who laid the bricks of the building you're standing in."

Community colleges are often the link between the workforce and the new manufacturing jobs. Many jobs in manufacturing, technology and biotechnology don't require college degrees, but they do require training and certifications offered by community colleges.

The Ventura County Community College District is part of a consortium of school districts that recently won a $13.2 million state grant from the California Career Pathways Trust. The grant is
helping the college district build "pathways" to careers in technology, skilled manufacturing, health care and other well-paid industries, Ventura College President Greg Gillespie said during his speech to about 225 attendees on Thursday.

"It's not just a matter of getting the student on a pathway. It's ultimately a matter of getting them in a job in our area, and that's where we'd like your input and support," he said to the crowd, which was largely made up of representatives of local businesses.

The event also raised over $7,000 for business scholarships at Ventura College.

Kish Rajan, the director of the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development, pointed to manufacturing as one of the engines of California's economic recovery. The state has had three straight years of manufacturing job gains, for the first time since the 1990s, and California remains the nation's leader in manufacturing output.

However, manufacturing's share of California's job market has been shrinking for years. A modern American factory floor hardly has any people on it; machines do the heavy lifting, and the workers program, monitor and repair the machines.

"Even with all of these numbers that indicate fundamental strengths ... there is indeed a difference between economic output and jobs," Rajan said.

California's unemployment rate has dropped to 7.4 percent, from 12.2 percent in 2010. But the prosperity has spread unevenly, said Rajan, who mentioned a recent visit to Imperial County, where unemployment remains almost 25 percent.

"What I see is in fact a bifurcation of California's economy, where high-tech jobs are growing and you see them concentrated in the coastal areas of our state," he said. "Conversely, you don't have to go too far anywhere up and down the length of the state to the east to see a dramatically different picture."

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