



## 2026 BREAKOUT SESSIONS

**Shane Cantrell, NWIRC**

**Kersey (11:30) & Erie (9:30)**

### **Smart Automation for Real World ROI**

Nearly half of automation projects leave manufacturers with buyer's remorse often due to unclear objectives, unrealistic expectations, or poor planning. This session tackles the most common challenges facing manufacturers today, including workforce shortages, increasing customer demands, and underperforming investments. Attendees will learn practical methods for evaluating ROI, calculating payback periods, and understanding opportunity costs. The presentation will also introduce tools such as benefit calculators and impact-versus-complexity charts, along with NWIRC's automation assessments and funding resources. Join Shane Cantrell of NWIRC to learn how to make confident, data-driven automation decisions that generate measurable returns and support long-term growth.



**Jeff Craig, Fuss & O'Neill**

**Kersey (12:30) & Erie (10:30)**

### **Breaking the Reactive Cycle: Practical Steps to Predictive Maintenance and AI-Driven Reliability**

Too many manufacturers operate in constant firefighting mode—struggling with equipment downtime, limited personnel, and maintenance tasks that add little real value. In this session, Jeff Craig of Fuss & O'Neill Manufacturing Solutions will demystify predictive maintenance and show how machine shops can move from reactive chaos to proactive reliability. Attendees will learn how to overcome common barriers, use data to detect early failure modes, and integrate technologies such as ultrasound monitoring and AI-enhanced analytics. Discover how practical PdM strategies can reduce unplanned downtime, increase capacity, and build a sustainable reliability culture.



**Nicholas Carrier, Sintergy**

**Kersey (1:30)**

### **AI in Action: Real Shop-Floor Insights from Sintergy**

Artificial intelligence in manufacturing is often presented as a finished solution — dashboards, predictions, and automation. But for most manufacturers, the real challenge isn't AI... it's understanding what information they already have and how to use it. In this session, Nicholas Carrier of Sintergy walks through the practical journey from traditional production to data-aware



**Chalmer Ritzert, Imperial Systems Erie (11:30)**

### **Scaling Smart: Automation Strategies That Grow with Your Shop**

As machine shops push for greater efficiency and long-term growth, scalable automation becomes a powerful competitive advantage. In this session, Chalmer Ritzert, Chief Operating Officer of Imperial Systems, Inc. shares practical approaches for implementing automation that evolves with your operations—improving workflow, boosting productivity,



*manufacturing. Using real shop-floor examples, he explains how process knowledge, measurement, and everyday production decisions naturally evolve into usable data, and how that data becomes the foundation for meaningful AI adoption. Rather than focusing on complex algorithms, this presentation shows how manufacturers can begin by organizing what they already know, why many AI efforts fail before they start, and how small changes in thinking can unlock major improvements in quality, efficiency, and predictability. Attendees will leave with a clear mental model of what AI actually means in a manufacturing environment, and a practical understanding of where their own operation likely sits on the path today.*

*and supporting sustainable expansion. Learn how to identify high-impact opportunities, streamline processes, and build a future-ready automation roadmap.*

**John Williams, Jacob Allen March & Mark Rubeo**

**Kersey (2:30) & Erie (12:30)**

### ***Accelerating Manufacturing Innovation and Workforce Development with Penn State***

*Discover how Penn State's innovation network drives manufacturing competitiveness across Northwestern Pennsylvania. The North Central PA LaunchBox, Erie's James R. Meehl Innovation Commons and the NWPB Innovation Beehive Network offer an integrated support system that combines product development, prototyping, and business planning with technical training and mentorship. Leveraging student talent, faculty expertise, and collaborative problem-solving, these resources help manufacturers break through barriers to innovation and business growth. Penn State also strengthens the regional workforce pipeline through its free METAL and ACE programs, which introduce participants to machining, metalcasting, forging, and advanced manufacturing through a blend of online learning and expert-led, hands-on training.*

