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Automotive Report – November 17, 2017

This past Friday, November 17th, we kicked off our second **Skills for Life** trip of the 2017-2018 school year. This is the third year that the Bridge Youth Center has run this program, and we are excited about the opportunities this year has to offer. The gist of this program is to shine light to students about great career opportunities right here in the community. We have found that many students approaching their senior year of high school are unsure if college is the right choice for them; many are looking for an alternative method to build a career. Students tend to be oblivious to the opportunities our community has to offer. Whether that is manufacturing, construction, or health services to name a few, our goal is to visit these businesses and start networking and building relationships for students who may be interested in a specific field.

Our first of three stops throughout the day lead us to **Gentex** corp. Gentex is a manufacturing company that focuses mainly in the automotive, aerospace, and fire protection industries. The market with the most weight in terms of production would be the automotive industry. Gentex manufactures rear view mirrors for vehicles and is on the cutting edge of innovation when it comes to their mirrors. With their electronic focus, they control 90% of the innovative mirror market. When we first arrived, we were greeted by Chuck Werling. Chuck focuses mainly on leadership development for Gentex. He began by explaining to the students the history of how Gentex was started and the timeline of the company. Gentex was started in 1974, and has grown to become the largest employer in Ottawa County, employing 5000 people. After discussing some of the history about Gentex, we were taken into their show room which displayed their latest and greatest electronic rear view mirrors. They had a jeep and a motorcycle on display with their electronic, video mirrors hooked up. It was very cool to see exactly how the process works. A video camera is attached to the rear of the vehicle which is sending a live feed right to the rear view mirror. This technology alleviates the possibility of blind spots, as well as trying to see around heads in a full car scenario. After our time in the showroom, Chuck continued his tour into the large and fancy cafeteria that they have. Gentex values the well-being of the employee



so they wanted to have a nice place where employees can take a break. It is also large enough to where employees can invite their families to eat with them if they choose to do so. Following the cafeteria, Chuck led us upstairs where we had an awesome view of their manufacturing floor. One thing the students noticed right away is how clean the production line was. It was not your stereotypical, dirty assembly line. Gentex upholds a high standard of cleanliness, and it shows in their production. Next, we were led to their workout facility which was magnificent, and open almost 24 hours a day. Also, free of charge for employees. Finally, Chuck took us into a lecture room where he shared some additional facts



about the company and opened it up for Q & A. Chuck shared that Gentex values attributes such as: responsibility, positive attitudes, teamwork, communication, and innovation. With that, they offer apprentice programs for their maintenance technicians, as well as tuition reimbursement for any employee of theirs. If you wanted to start full time work right out of high school, Gentex pays \$13/hr to start for an entry level position on the manufacturing floor. All in all, the students really enjoyed their visit at Gentex; they saw a growing company with many job opportunities.

Following Gentex, our next destination on the agenda was **Crown Motors**. When we arrived at Crown, we were greeted by the General Manager, Brad Siegers. Brad instructed the students to take some time to look around the numerous showrooms of cars that they had. The kids were ecstatic looking at some of the brand new cars they had in display. After car viewing, Brad introduced us to JP Vandenberg, the operations manger. JP talked to the student about the process of servicing your car at Crown, and elaborating on each step that takes place; from making an appointment, to picking up your car at the end of the service. JP then led the students into the shop to illustrate the dynamics of the service department. He explained that technicians at Crown have a wide range of responsibilities. For instance, an entry level lube technician starts at \$12/hr, whereas a well experienced technician can make over \$100,000 a year. As JP shared, it shows that you are constantly growing and developing as an employee, as well as a person at Crown. As you develop as a technician you start to specialize in more specific brands of cars. Crown has Honda technicians, Mazda technicians, Cadillac technicians etc. After our time in the service department, JP then led us to the parts department. Crown's parts department ships parts to technicians, customers, body shops, and individuals. Crown's umbrella contains many brands of cars. That being said, at each one of their locations there is a separate parts department. For their Buick, Honda, Cadillac, Mazda location they only manage the parts of those brands, within that specific facility. Nonetheless,



that is still four brands of parts, which means you need to have a deep understanding of your parts inventory. After our stop at the parts department, our students were getting pretty hungry. As a result, Brad showed us into the break room, where they had pizza waiting for us. While we were eating the delicious pizza, we continued conversation with Brad. He shared with the students some of the key values that Crown upholds: faith, family, and work, and in that order. He also shared that a college education is not a requirement to work at Crown. If you work hard, are teachable, and show discipline, opportunities will attract to you. Additionally, they look at two major aspects of a person when hiring. First, they look at your character; your team work abilities, attitude, work ethic etc. And then they look at your competency; your willingness to learn, your ability to retain information, your teach ability etc. The students were inspired by the amount of investment Crown has in their employees. Brad also briefly covered other areas of employment such as sales, customer service, detailing, and administrative assisting. As a whole, the students loved our visit to Crown Motors. They expressed enjoyment in Crowns business culture, as well as the level of investment and opportunities they give their employees.

After Crown, our last stop of the day brought us to **LG Chem**. When we first arrived, we were greeted by Jeremy Hagemeyer, a human resource representative. Jeremy explained that LG Chem holds cleanliness to a very high standard because of the toxic materials they work with. With that, he had all of the students and leaders in our group put booties over top of our shoes so we didn't track in any outside germs. Jeremy then led us upstairs into a conference room to briefly discuss their business. LG Chem is a manufacturer of battery cells. As I mentioned, they place a high value on sanitation, and with sanitation



comes safety. Working with a lot of hazardous chemicals leaves no room for mere acceptable safety precautions; they must strive for exceptional safety precautions. Jeremy then began to briefly explain the process of making battery cells before our tour, beginning at the mixing stage, and ending at the drying stage. Immediately following Jeremy's brief explanation, we were privileged with meeting the President of LG Chem. He gave us a broader understanding of the implications their product has on the automotive industry. He shared that their battery cells are directly used within the hybrid and electric vehicles you see on the street today. Next, we were introduced to Jacob Heemstra, a chemical engineer that would be giving us a tour of their operations. Before we could enter into their production areas, we were required to wear full body suits and head nets to keep us safe from any dangerous chemicals. Jacob showed our students every step of the process that goes into making the battery cells. We saw the initial process of mixing the chemicals for coating which was very interesting. After mixing, we saw the mixed chemicals being coated onto the cell sheet. Next, we saw the

coated cell sheet enter into a roll press, which adheres two cell sheets with the chemical mixture. Then we walked through the sitting area where the cells essentially digest the chemical process that they underwent. Next, Jacob walked us through the notching phase, where the cells are ran through machines that shape them into their correct size. And finally, we saw the vacuum dry stage where the cells are dried and staged for a number of days before they are shipped to LG's customers. Yes, this is a very detailed and intricate process that we were shown. Our students were amazed at the level of sanitation within the production process. The entire facility is made up of cleanrooms that had a sort of laboratory feel to it. After the tour Jacob gave, Jeremy led us back into the conference room where he had a couple operators and maintenance workers share a little bit about their job specifications. An entry-level job at LG is considered a tech-operator. This position handles the materials in the production process and pays \$14.50-\$19.50/hr. The next advancement opportunity is titled a Sr. tech operator. This position is similar; however, it consists of more leadership responsibilities. A Sr. tech starts at &20/hr. Additionally, the maintenance technicians make around \$25/hr and are responsible for the upkeep of the machines and the facility. After we heard from the technicians, Jeremy shared some additional characteristics of LG. Some of their values include a hard work ethic, a positive attitude, an embrace for change, and discipline. Jeremy also highlighted that LG employs 500 people and are continuously hiring as their product demand continues to increase. Before we were on our way back to the high schools, Jeremy sent the students out with cookies and a t-shirt, very nice! To wrap up, the students enjoyed the need for detail at LG and they felt that the company held themselves to a high standard of quality work.

Special thanks to Gentex, Crown Motors, and LG Chem for hosting our students on Friday! An additional thank you to Crown Motors for the pizza, and LG Chem for the souvenir!

Student Comments:

“I really like the growth and momentum Gentex has.” -11th grader, Zeeland West

“I had no idea the opportunities Gentex can offer right here in my back yard. It was very cool to see what exactly they do.” -10th grader, Zeeland West

“Crown Motors had a more family oriented feel to it, which I really liked.” -12th grader, Zeeland East

“I had no clue that you could make that much money as a car technician!” -11th grader, Zeeland West

“The brand new Cadillacs were sweet!” -10th grader, Zeeland East

“I felt like a scientist with my body suit on walking through LG Chem’s production areas.” -11th grader, Zeeland East

“I had no idea what LG Chem did. It was so cool to see the ins and outs of how a battery cell is made.” -12th grader, Zeeland West

“LG Chem has great job opportunities and they pay close attention to detail.” -12th grader, Zeeland East.