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Manufacturing Productions Report – September 27, 2017

This past Friday, September 27th, we kicked off our first **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 nine monthly trips throughout the school year focused on manufacturing productions. We went to three local manufacturing businesses throughout the day: Herman Miller, Plascore, and JR Automation. We started the day off with **Herman Miller** by taking a nice tour through their 16th St. greenhouse site in Zeeland. The kids really enjoyed this building because of its modern appeal and size. We met up with Alison Freas when we arrived. She was essentially our facilitator/guide for the morning. Alison introduced us to a work team leader name Carlos. Carlos took us inside the production area and showed the students step-by-step, how a Herman Miller chair is assembled. We were introduced to everyday operations and got a good feel for the culture and environment within the facility. Students began to notice all of the different job positions and the mobility that Herman Miller offers. For example, when you get hired in on the production line your beginning title is a "Manufacturing Associate". This position requires at least a high school diploma or GED and pays \$13.32/hr also offering great benefits immediately. After 6 months of service at Herman miller, you are eligible to bid and apply for any position you are qualified for. Some positions include a facilitator, work team leader, first responder, safety, sales etc. Herman Miller believes heavily in building and educating employees for interior promotions. One great





program that supports this is the tuition reimbursement program. After six months of work for Herman Miller, they will provide 100% tuition reimbursement for employees looking to further their education and potentially move up the company ladder. This program really caught the attention of many students. Herman Miller is a local company that strives to benefit the local communities around it. One way they practice this is by only working with suppliers within a 90-mile radius of their Zeeland locations. This provides business for other local companies and contributes to the employment rate in our surrounding communities. We were also privileged enough to get the

opportunity to listen to a number of different employees within the company share a little bit about their story at Herman Miller and how the company has given them the opportunity to advance and establish their careers. Employees from maintenance, supply-chain, and the finance department all shared with us. It was a diverse panel that all had something unique to share with our students. Additionally, the Director of Operations for the Zeeland Plants also took time out of his day to share his path at Herman Miller, and express a message of hard work and dedication. The students were blown away at the level of investment Herman Miller gave to them Friday morning.

Following Herman Miller, we made our way to **Plascore, Inc.** This was one of the more unique visits we have gone through simply because our entire group wasn't really sure what Plascore does. We were welcomed by the Human Resource representative Kate Tejada. Kate took us upstairs to a conference room where she gave us a brief presentation of the company, and the goods that they produce. Plascore is a manufacturer of Honeycomb Cores, and honeycomb panels. It's safe to say that few people in our group really knew what a Honeycomb Core was. Essentially, it is a plastic compound material that can be used as a sort of "filling" for many different products. The competitive advantage of honeycomb core is that it is lightweight, durable, and fireproof. As far as the core is considered, this material is used in the aerospace industry i.e. plane walls, floors, and doors. Additionally, this product is used in train doors, crash test barriers, and showroom floors. Honeycomb core is also used in the pharmaceutical industry. Pharma and science fields use this product to construct *clean rooms* for laboratory testing and pharmaceutical processing. The versatility of honeycomb core is one reason why it is in such high demand. Following our meeting in the conference room, Kate handed us over to Steve, the manager of operations, to take us on a tour of their manufacturing floor and show us the processes that go into creating a honeycomb core. Steve explained how the core is pressed, rolled, and spread with adhesive to maintain linkage. The manufacturing process is very machine oriented in that it does not require many human hands to produce a sheet of honeycomb core. Furthermore, they manufacture all of their honeycomb panels within their facility and then ship them out to their customers in bundles of large sheets. Their



customers will then cut the sheets down to whatever size they need for their specific projects. After learning what exactly Plascore does, we learned a little more about the company itself. Plascore is a Zeeland based company with a total of 300 employees. Though they are run out of Zeeland, they ship their products all over the world. Like Herman Miller, Plascore also offers tuition reimbursement as a symbol of deep investment in their employees. An entry-level position pays \$12.92 for 1st shift and offers an additional \$1.00 premium for 2nd or 3rd shift. These positions would mainly consist of adhesives spreading, and packaging. Advancement opportunities include: supervisor, operator, sales, traffic coordinators, customer service, and upper level management. Not to mention, Plascore is currently under construction, as they are doubling the size of one of their manufacturing facilities. That being said, they are going to be looking to hire in the near future. Great career opportunities were presented to us by Plascore on Friday!

Lastly, we got the privilege to visit **JR Automation**. Most of our students had heard of JR Automation and were vaguely familiar with what they do. We met up with the administrative assistant Emily Cook who walked us through JR's New Holland location and talked to us about JR's company details. In a nutshell, JR Automation manufactures and assembles machines for other companies to purchase and use for



their manufacturing process. More specifically, they lead the world in a number of technical applications, some of these including laser and robotics integration, plastic and fabric processing systems, and metal processing technologies. JR employs tons of engineers and technicians that understand machines and the technical perspective of automation. They work with many different companies and they ship their machines to 16 countries across the globe. Some of the industries they are involved in consist of the food industry, automotive, construction, pharmaceutical, and alternative energy to name a few. With all of the

technology and automation growth we have seen in the last decade, this has allowed for JR to grow from 490 employees two years ago to 1100 today. JR now has facilities in nine different locations, seven of which are right here in Holland! This growth is extremely rapid and takes strategic planning to maintain efficiency and effectiveness. In direct correlation with growth are job opportunities. Emily stated that on average, JR hires almost five new employees a week.

Some of these job opportunities range from all departments and include: quoting, machine and fabrication, IT, sales, HR, purchasing, finance, facility maintenance, logistics, machine building, technology writing, project managers, electricians, plumbers, and of course the engineers. JR offers wonderful benefits and even provides a 6% match on 401k. JR is on the cutting edge of innovation and the students were well aware of that by the end of our visit with them. It is unprecedented that there are career opportunities within this company. Growth is a great sign, and Emily made a point by saying that it is true that JR has seen a ton of growth in the last two years; however, they have not lost their intimate, family atmosphere within the company. This is impressive because it shows where the company holds their values.



Special thanks to Herman Miller, Plascore, and JR Automation for taking time out of your day and allowing us to visit your businesses! And an additional thanks to Plascore for providing pizza!

Student Comments:

“I am interested in marketing and I thought Herman Miller had several opportunities in that field as well as many others; the atmosphere and modern look was appealing. (Junior Zeeland East)

“I really like the smaller, family feel of Plascore” (Sophomore Zeeland East)

“The family feel and Holland based locations for JR Automation grabbed my attention” (Sophomore Zeeland West)

“Herman Miller seemed to have many different career opportunities and they seem very invested in their employees as well as young people trying to figure out what they want to do” (Junior Zeeland East)

“I had no idea Plascore made honeycomb cores, I’d never even heard of a honeycomb core. It was really cool to see how it was made” (Sophomore Zeeland West)

“JR Automation must be doing something right if they have grown that much in the last two years.” (Junior Zeeland West)

“I had no idea Herman Miller was the 2nd largest office furniture manufacturer in the world!” (Sophomore Zeeland East)

“Today opened my eyes at the career opportunities available” (Junior Zeeland East)