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This past Friday, December 8th, we kicked off our third **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 on the agenda for the day, led us to **Holland Litho**. Many of the students had not heard of Holland Litho, which made it fun to be able to visit their facility and see what they are all about. When we arrived, we were introduced to Brian Baarman. Brian is the VP of Finance and Administration and is also part owner with his brothers. Brian began the tour by showing the students some sample products that they have on display, also explaining the premise of the company. Holland Litho is a print shop that prints anything you can imagine on paper. They have a wide range of clients and print a variety of items such as: postcards, self-mailers, pocket folders, letterhead/envelopes, brochures, calendars, catalogs/magazines, books, posters, menus, and even packaging. Brian explained that Holland Litho has four different methods that they use to print these products; the oxidation method, the UV



method, the zero graphical method, and the electro static liquid ink method. The oxidation and UV methods both are done in large, conventional presses that produce print at a very high rate. The main difference between the two methods is that the UV method dries the ink quicker and with a higher gloss. Now, the xerographical method and the electro static method are both digital printing methods. Digital printing is a much newer style of printing that transfers the image on your computer directly onto paper. These methods do not

require ink; instead they use dry powder as a sort of photocopying technique to transfer images. The only difference between these two digital printing methods is the application of what they are printing. Without a doubt, the students found that the printing process is much more technical than they had thought. Furthermore, Brian toured us through the binding and folding stations, and the warehouse. The binding and folding stations are primarily focused on the packaging side of printing. They print their packaging on card stock or other thicker sheets, and then run the sheets through a binder and folder, which prepare the packaging for assembly by folding edges and preparing the printed material for three dimensional packaging assemblies. After viewing the binding section, Brian walked us through the warehouse. The warehouse holds all of the finished goods that Holland Litho has produced. It also is the shipping location where trucks are loaded with product and sent to customers. As we meandered back to the front offices of the building, Brian shared some of Holland Litho's entry-level specs. Some of these positions include loading pockets into printers, making plates, loading paper, and mailing. The starting wage for an entry-level position at Holland Litho is \$12/hr. All required training is done in house, although, there is some college programs that center around printing. Brian referenced Ferris State's print management program as a quality printing program. Furthermore, Holland Litho offers great benefits to their employees including: dental, vision, disability, 401k etc. All in all, the students enjoyed seeing the different processes that go into printing and were intrigued by the opportunities in this industry.

Following Holland Litho, we made our way to **Charter House Innovations**. When we arrived, we were greeted by Robin Peterson, the Human Resource Manager. Robin was essentially our tour guide for the day. She would lead us from department to department to attain a wide variety of knowledge about the company. Before we started our department visits, Robin gave us a rundown of the company. Charter House Innovations couples design with manufacturing to create custom furniture for many commercial applications. They work with large brands such as: McDonalds, Burger King, KFC, Denny's, Arby's, Pizza Hut, and City Flats Hotel. The entirety of their process is done in two locations, Holland and Zeeland. Their Holland location is strictly a saw mill that cuts wood, furniture parts into a relative size. Their Zeeland location is their main headquarters that houses departments including: design, marketing, project management, engineering, custom building, upholstery, shipping, and welding. Before heading to our first department visit, we had the privilege of spending a few minutes talking to the president of



the company, Chuck Reid. Chuck told us his story about how he started Charter House and the unforeseeable career avenues that he has had in his life. He provided our students insight regarding the idea of growth and opportunity this area offers. He relayed the message of persistence and attitude. He explained that having a hopeful, positive attitude toward a personal goal is essential. Moreover, pairing that attitude with persistence is an ingredient for success. Next, Robin led us to the design department to meet up with interior designers Alison Mulder and Alecia Wierenga. Alison has been with Charter House for four years, and

Alecia one. Both of them shared some vital information about the aspects of their job and how to attain an interior design position. First off, the majority of the day is spent on the computer using AutoCAD and 3D modeling software. This can be a major misconception with interior design. They both shared that commercial design is different than residential design in that they are not always working directly with the customer. More of their time is spent on the computer trying to come up with creative interior environments and furniture. When working on Hotels or other large buildings, they tackle the project room by room. The interior designers divvy up the amount of rooms that need to be designed and then each designer is in charge of designing a certain number of rooms. This gives them freedom to be creative and innovative, although, the creative director still needs to approve it. Finally, Alison and Alecia shared that to attain their position, college is required. They listed off a number of schools that have great interior design programs; Western, CMU, MSU, and Kendall to name a few. After our stop with the Interior designers, Robin led us to the graphic designers. We were introduced to Bryce Driesenga and Mandie Gibson. Bryce has been with Charter House for five years, and Mandie six. They shared that their job requires creativity, curiosity, attention to detail, and flexibility. They translate a lot of their graphics on printed material such as: gift cards, post cards, posters etc. They also put their graphics on three dimensional materials like coasters, flash drives, and Kouzis. Like interior design, graphic design strongly recommends a college education; Kendall College and Ferris State are good schools to consider. Next, Robin introduced us to Keith McRobert, the marketing communications manager. Keith shared with us the aspects of marketing in today's world and the requirements necessary to reach a marketing position. He made a point in saying that marketing requires strong analytical and creative skills and the ability to understand the unmet needs of the customer. In the today's modern world, we see inbound marketing tactics (social media, blog, testimonials, etc.) and outbound tactics (brochures, ads, trade shows, etc.). Charter House performs business-to-business marketing meaning that they are marketing and selling to other businesses, not directly to consumers. Furthermore, a marketing position does require a college degree. Keith pointed out that Grand Valley and Davenport are good, local schools with quality programs. After our visit with Keith, Robin led us to the Project Management department where we met with Regina Muhr and Amanda Rowe. Amanda is the project management supervisor and oversees Regina and other project managers. Being a project manager requires having good organizational skills, communication skills, and being able to see a project from start to finish. They are the facilitators of the project and are in charge of maintaining a good work flow and managing time in a way that is most efficient. They essentially work with every department that is involved with a project, from sales to custom building, and are responsible for making the project run according to plan. A business degree or experience in construction management would be very helpful working in this department. Following project management, Robin led our group to the engineering department. When we arrived at the engineering department, Robin



introduced our group to Jorge Gutierrez and Jon Kramer. Jon and Jorge are both engineers; however, they took a bit of an unconventional route to get there. Neither one of them hold a bachelor's degree, although, they both attended some college classes. That being said, a college education is very highly recommended if you want to be an engineer, but that is not the only way to get there. Jorge and Jon both proved their skills in the workplace and worked their way up into those positions. Some of the skills that they highlighted are necessary to have, in order to do what they do is good analytical skills, communication skills, and organizational skills; also being proficient in math, AutoCAD, Inventor, and CNC programming. Jon and Jorge put all of these skills together to draw up blueprints, and figure out exactly how each project is going to be built.

After our time spent with the engineering department, we were introduced to Ryan Vogelheim, the operations manager of production. Ryan oversees all of production, starting with raw materials being purchased, to order fulfillment of finished goods. His position requires strong organizational skills, problem solving skills, communication skills, and motivational skills. At this point in our visit, Ryan sort of took over as tour guide and introduced us to Gilberto Casillas-Vega, the upholstery supervisor, Calvin Heyd, the custom building supervisor, Kelly Cutler-Schafer, the shipping supervisor, and Jeff Russell, the steel production manager. Gilberto shared with us the importance of valuing quality upholstery. This piece of the furniture has the most direct contact with the customer so it is important to hold quality to a high standard. Being an upholsterer requires strong communication skills, patience, attention to detail, and being able to understand and read blueprints. Calvin shared that his position requires strong people skills, a deep understanding of the product, multitasking, leadership, organizational skills, and attention to detail. Custom building obliges the ability to take what's on a blueprint and translate that into a three dimensional piece of furniture. Kelly then shared with us that every day is different in the shipping department. From preparing orders, to doing paperwork, every day is a little bit different. She explained that her position requires attention to detail, multitasking, moving product with a hi-lo, and patience. Finally, Jeff explained that his position as steel production manager necessitates good management practices, welding abilities, machining, robotics, blueprint reading, and maintenance. Jeff schedules employees and oversees the entire steel production process. After meeting with our contacts in production, it was time for our group to head out and make our way to the next destination on our agenda. As a whole, the kids loved being able to literally see every step of the process in making furniture. From the design stage, all the way to the shipping stage, students were amazed at all the detail and open communication that goes into running this operation smoothly.

Our final stop of the day led us to the **Holland Sentinel**. When we first arrived, we were greeted by Steve Kenemer, the circulation director. Steve was the leader of our tour and was in charge of facilitating our visit. When people think of the Holland Sentinel they typically just think of the newspaper that they deliver; people don't realize that they have grown into something much bigger than that. Steve shared that Holland Sentinel is part of a large national media company called the Gatehouse Media. This company has approximately six hundred newspapers, nine of which are in Michigan. They share an interesting relationship, in that Gatehouse gives the Sentinel enough breathing room for them to be applicable and relevant in the local community. Steve also shared some other interesting specs with us about the company. The Sentinel has about fifty employees and eighty contractors (stringers and delivery carriers). Additionally, they print their newspaper in Allegan and it is trucked to Holland in the middle of the night for delivery the next day. Moreover, their printed newspaper reaches 8,800 on weekdays and peaks at 15,500 on Sundays. They have a digital reach of 275,850 page views a month,

56,000 website logins a month, over 15,000 Facebook friends, and 7,000 twitter followers. Throughout our time at Holland Sentinel we covered topics including: editing/writing, reporting, advertising, digital media, and circulation. First off, Steve introduced our group to Sarah Leach, the editor-in-chief. Sarah is responsible for managing staff members, delegating tasks, and having final say in the content put in the paper. She elaborated that if students were interested in getting into the writing/editing/reporting field, journalism, communications, and English would be good subjects to study. The reporters at the sentinel are broke down into their own avenue of news. For example, there are different reporters for business, government, sports, and public safety. Additionally, separate editors are all assigned to the reporters



covering each topic. Sarah then oversees each topic editor and is responsible for the final clearing of material before it is published. After talking with Sarah, Steve led us to the advertising department. We met with Haley Kelly, one of their ad creators. Haley explained that creating ads requires creativity, innovation, diligence, and a fast paced work style. She said that she enjoys the freedom she has to create her ads, although, that freedom is balanced with deadlines to keep her on track. After talking with Haley, we met with James Briggs, the advertising director, and Jillyn May, the digital ad manager. Jillyn and James

explained that advertising today rather than twenty or thirty years ago is so much different. With the internet being the main source of attaining information, advertising has shown a large presence on the internet. They said that companies still pay for ads in their paper; however, more and more companies are paying for ads on their website. Businesses will pay for the amount of time it is shown on the top banner, or on the side of their homepage. Digital advertising is only growing, whereas printed ads are declining in relevance. After visiting the advertising folk, Steve walked us downstairs and into the circulation department. The circulation department is responsible for distributing the newspaper to homes and businesses. On top of that, they handle all customer service involved with delivering the paper. The routes are broken up by streets and areas of the city. The delivery carriers are then responsible for fulfilling the customers in their route with the newspaper. Steve pointed out that they are currently looking to hire around twelve new delivery carriers. At this point in our visit, it was time for us to head back to school. The students really enjoyed their time at the Holland Sentinel and learned a lot about all the different components that go into producing media.

Special thanks to Holland Litho, Charter House Innovations, and the Holland Sentinel for hosting our students on Friday and teaching them media/design applications!

Student Comments:

“I really enjoyed seeing all the different steps involved in the process of making furniture, I never knew how much went into it” -10th grader, Zeeland West

“I had no idea all of the different paper products that could be printed with large printing presses” -10th grader, Zeeland West

“I am interested in interior design and it was nice to see the daily tasks that go into it” -10th grader, Zeeland East

“I had no idea that the Holland Sentinel made a majority of their money from advertising” -10th grader, Zeeland East

“Charter House seemed to have a ton of job opportunities and still maintained a close-knit feel” -10th grader, Zeeland West