



210 E Main
Zeeland, MI 49464
616-772-3843

jed.mulderbmc@gmail.com
ty.potter@bymczeeland.org

Written by Ty Potter

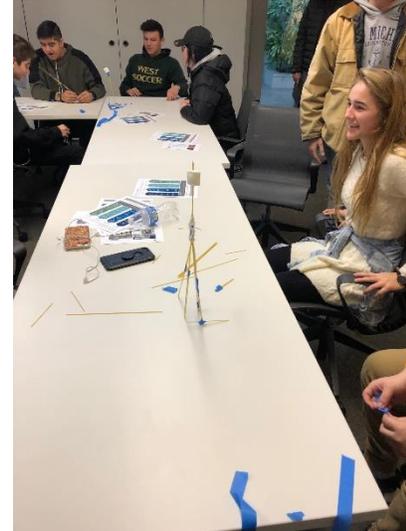
Manufacturing Productions Report – November 16, 2018

This past Friday, November 16th, we kicked off our second **Skills for Life** trip of the 2018-2019 school year. This is the fourth 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 introduce local career opportunities, in various industries, to our students. 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 second of eight monthly trips throughout the school year focused on manufacturing productions. We started our trip with **Herman Miller**. When we arrived, we were greeted by Alison Freas - our facilitator for the morning. Alison explained Herman Miller as a business and the different career opportunities that they offer. Herman Miller is the second largest office furniture manufacturer in the world and is headquartered right here in Zeeland, MI. They have about 4,000 employees in Ottawa County and are currently hiring. They are not the only businesses hiring right now, Alison stated that in Ottawa County, there are currently .8 person(s) to every 1 job opening. This means that there is a shortage in labor supply, resulting in high employment opportunities. Alison also shared that Herman Miller values community, environment and sustainability, diversity and inclusion, and equity. They sell their products to other businesses who then sell them directly to the customer. All their products are made-to-order, meaning that they manufacture as client orders are coming in – they do not hold any excess inventory. After Alison shared about Herman Miller’s background, she talked more specifically about different job opportunities within the company. 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 roughly \$14/hr, offering great benefits effective 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 also offers great apprenticeship programs in electrical and machine repair mechanics. They typically pay very well and include tuition reimbursement for necessary classes. After 4-5 years, once the program is completed, the starting pay for a licensed journeyman is approximately \$55,000/year. After Alison completed her presentation, we played a game involving the construction of an object out of spaghetti, rope, and tape. The objective was to build something out of the materials that would hold up a marshmallow off the table. The tallest working object would win. This simulation got students thinking about design and creatively thinking of solutions to a problem. Alison said this is a good analogy for what many positions at Herman can be like and how creativity and engineering are very valuable. After the simulation, we took a tour of the facility to better understand the processes that go into building furniture. The students were able to see an assembly line in action and watch all the different stages from beginning to end. It was helpful for them to translate what Alison was describing into an experience that they can see and hear. All in all, they really enjoyed visiting Herman Miller. They felt the company was very professional and had great career opportunities.



Following Herman Miller, we visited **Ventura Manufacturing**. When we first arrived, we were greeted by several employees. They first sat us down in a conference room and shared a bit about what Ventura does and why they do it. Ventura is part of a broader collective of companies within the InnoGroup. Some notable sister companies to Ventura would be Innotec, Inontime, and Vortec Tooling. Ventura



manufactures numerous products such as office furniture, optical lighting, and automotive interior parts. They pride themselves on a set of values that conducts the way they do business. These values include: trust, humility, service, fun, forgiveness, learning, change, hard work, and teamwork. On top of their values they have a stewardship code that says to grow people, give generously, employ, and produce beneficial products. This is an innovative company that grows the community along with themselves. After a brief introduction, we participated in an activity involving making cookies in the form of an assembly line. All the students were able to participate, and they all played different roles. They got the opportunity to learn first-hand how an assembly line works in the form of cookie making. After the activity, we split up into three groups and toured their facility. We looked at their automotive section, their optical lighting section, and their shipping and

receiving section. Students were able to see how each product is made and how different machines help produce different products. It was very neat. After the tour, we headed back into the conference room to chat a bit more about job opportunities and the qualities that go into a good employee. When Ventura is looking to hire an employee, they take in account a person's character before any other trait. In their eyes, somebody who has a good heart and work ethic, but may not know anything about manufacturing is much more appealing than someone who may know the trade but seems arrogant or not as responsible and driven. Ventura believes that you can teach somebody the skills of the business, but you can't teach someone's character. They are what I would call a "no classism" company. They offer an open concept with their office personal and the workers on the line, meaning that the offices in the building are not completely separated by the production side. Ventura strives for everyone to work together as a unit with no social bureaucratic tendencies from administration to manufacturers. They focus heavily on problem solving and critical thinking and are willing to sacrifice a little bit of time to possibly come up with a new and improved idea for their business operations. Ventura offers 2 shifts, 8 hrs each, with starting wage at \$12/hr. They do also hire 16 and 17 year old's and manage 60 part-time employees. As a whole, the students enjoyed their visit to Ventura. They liked their values and that they are a smaller, tight-knit company.



Lastly, we got the privilege to visit **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 Tejeda. 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. They are a Zeeland based company with a



total of 370 employees. Though they are run out of Zeeland, they ship their products all over the world. It's safe to say that few people in our group really knew what a Honeycomb Core was. Essentially, it is a compound material that can be used as a sort of "filling" or "core" for many different products. This honeycomb material can be made from plastic, paper, or metal. 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. Like Herman Miller, Plascore also offers tuition

reimbursement as a symbol of deep investment in their employees. An entry-level position pays \$14.77 for 1st shift and offers a 15% 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. Kate constructed a panel of employees from various departments to present their position and answer any questions students may have about the business. This was very beneficial because it gave students additional perspectives to gather information from and they learned about various roles within the company. We heard from folks in the shipping department, the engineering department, sales, corporate recruiting, operations management, and machine operations. Many of them said that they love the family atmosphere of Plascore, the benefits/compensation package, the people they work with, and the inclusivity of the company. Following our meeting in the conference room, we headed down to the production floor to see how honeycomb is manufactured. We learned 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 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. Plascore is also looking to construct another addition in the near future. Great career opportunities were presented to us via Plascore on Friday!



Special thanks to Herman Miller, Ventura Manufacturing, and Plascore for allowing us to visit with you and learn about the opportunities within your industries and companies. And thank you for the delicious pizza, Plascore!

Student Comments:

“I really like the environment and culture that Herman Miller has”

“I like the size of Ventura. It is big but not too big. It has a family feel”

“It seemed like all of the employees at Plascore really enjoy working there”

“I could see myself working for Herman Miller once I turn 18”

“Plascore treats their employees right with good pay and a lot of vacation time”

“I had no idea honeycomb existed!”

“Ventura seems to really care about the community”

