



Lights, Cameras, Action:

Employers Take a Starring Role in Career Awareness By Laura Byrnes

Google the phrase “career opportunity awareness” and you’ll come up with 87.1 million results in 0.56 seconds.

So yes, it’s a thing. A very big thing.

We have been zeroing in on this issue for several years now – starting in 2012 with Skills Gap focus groups and task force. What we learned through that process – what we were told by employers – is that the ability to build the Talent Pipeline necessary to meet business needs is stymied by a lack of knowledge about careers and training available in our own communities.

Lack of career awareness – and available training programs – is not just an issue for students and parents, but educators and businesses, alike.

Even an understanding of what’s “out there” can be eroded by our own bias or misunderstanding. Take for example manufacturing, often perceived of as grimy factories filled with unskilled laborers. But as I’ve often noted, today’s advanced manufacturing is cleaner, greener, high-tech with higher-than-average wages.

Another perception is that our schools are driven by the societal desire to direct graduates to four-year degrees, possibly to the exclusion of other post-secondary opportunities.

And businesses, especially those that are well established, may be hamstrung by the belief that since they’re well-known in the community, so too are their workforce needs.

So what is the strategy for creating career awareness among the disparate but dependent constituents?

To begin with, parents and students need easy access to information on business that hire graduates with specific skills our communities and available training. They need this earlier rather than later. We have launched Career Exploration programs with our education and industry partners in Marion County and are expanding that into Citrus County.

Access to this information is also critical for teachers and counselors who may have little time to do further exploration and whose school-based responsibilities may isolate them from the business world.

Likewise, business engagement in an advisory capacity for career programs in the K-12 and state college system can pave the way to more effective communication with educational leaders, students and parents.

I mentioned expanding efforts into Citrus County. Here’s another example of that. Earlier this year, we partnered with the Mid-Florida Manufacturers Association on a pilot program focusing on manufacturing. To date,

We have produced promotional videos for 19 manufacturers that highlight their products, work environment and the skills needed to succeed at their company.

Stevenson Dental Technology in Crystal River is one such manufacturer. The company, which has been doing business on the Nature Coast since 1993, makes crowns, bridges and dentures for dentists through prescriptions. The short (50-second) video explains how those interested can get a job straight out of high school, get training needed right on the job – learn while you earn – and, as Linda Stevenson explains, have a real career.

“Each person in our laboratory is valued for what they do. We’re a very close-knit group, it’s a very enjoyable place to work,” says Stevenson, adding that, appropriately enough, “everyone leaves at the end of the day with a smile on their face.”

Over in Ocala, Conimar Group manufacturers products you likely have in your home right now. Founded in 1976, this Ocala, Fla.-based company is the largest U.S. manufacturer of printed plastic placemats featuring trend-right themes in addition to designs under license from World Kitchen that feature their Corelle® dinnerware patterns.

Conimar is also a market leader in the production of food preparation mats under the Chop-Chop® Brand. The company’s patented flexible cutting mats feature Microban® antimicrobial protection, further advancing its objective of bringing consumer-safe products to the world marketplace.

James Mager, vice president of manufacturing, notes that the company “really cares about our employees; we go out of our way to get them to progress. They’re not just a number.”

Also in Ocala, Dimension Works, believes 3D printing is changing the way the world manufactures. The company leverages 30-plus years experience in manufacturing, product development and design to help clients innovate with efficiency and reduced costs. Services include professional grade 3D printers and materials, prototyping and 3D printing services, 3D scanning, and design services.

Dimension Works has helped bring creative thinking to life for a variety of clients, including the LA Dodgers. At their home opener last April, the Dodgers sported a new look on their batting helmets: a 3D printed LA logo – a first for Major League Baseball – created by Dimension Works in a collaborative effort with Pro Helmet Decals.

Paradox Intellectual Properties, based in Chiefland, developed the world’s first detonation flame arrestor design. Flame arrestors are critical safety devices and a component in the safe operation of vapor control systems. The company also researches, develops and manufactures inline flame arrestors, deflagration flame arrester and the United States Coast Guard-approved Detonation Flame Arrestor. Dwight Booker, the company’s president, founder and inventor, said that “working at Paradox offers employees something different, one day welding, another working with CNC plasma machines. There is also plenty of room to grow.”

Those are just some of area manufacturers featured in the program. Videos are aired in public schools; shared with students, their parents and job seekers at our career expos and jobs fairs; shown via our social media networks and website and on company websites, at trade shows – you name it.

We make it very easy for employers to participate by coordinating logistics and underwriting a substantial portion of the production. If you are a manufacturer in Citrus County or an IT company, and would like to learn more about this project, contact Rob Adamiak at 352-840-5764 or email radamiak@careersourceclm.com.

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