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## President Container Partners With SUNY To Train New Employees

by Len Prazych

When President Container built its “Super Plant” in Middletown, New York, three years ago (see BCN June 17, 2013), it faced many daunting challenges: maintaining its business operations in one location while moving to another, rebuilding its fleet of converting equipment to OEM specs, and keeping its customers happy throughout the entire process. One of the most confounding, however, was developing a local workforce with the basic math and workplace skills required for employment in a corrugator plant.

Dissatisfied with the quality of prospective employees attracted through classified ads and online job boards, President’s Vice President of Operations, Rich Goldberg, partnered with local college State University of New York (SUNY) Orange to help. The partnership between President Container and SUNY Orange came as state and federal governments were emphasizing improved connections between the classroom and the workplace to meet employers’ needs.

The program requires that prospective employees/students pay SUNY Orange \$12 each for 20 hours of classes over a period of eight weeks and pass a final

exam with no less than a 95. All classes were held in a training room at President Container. Of the 15 students that enrolled in its first class earlier this year, 12 completed the program and were awarded a job.



**Rich Goldberg, President Container’s Vice President of Operations, expresses his satisfaction with discovering a way to train and develop new employees.**

“It turned out great,” said Goldberg. “In fact, better than great, and now it’s essentially taking on a life of its own.”

Human Resources Manager Hope Godchaus emphasized workplace skills, including reliability and teamwork, during discussions with the candidates. Each was interviewed and required to provide a resume and cover letter explaining why they should work for the com

pany. Dressing properly for the interview, coming to work on time and dealing with problems on the job were some topics Godchaus addressed.

Holding training classes at the plant provided ancillary benefits, such as insight into candidates’ work habits.

“One of our biggest challenges is attendance,” Goldberg said. “We got to see that the people were coming to the classes every day. It showed a commitment.”

SUNY’s training classes at President Container cov-

ered basic math skills, including decimals, fractions and problem-solving strategies. Significant time was also spent on safety issues in a manufacturing environment. As an added benefit, students were able to develop a camaraderie with their classmates who became their fellow employees.

President Container's experience could lead to similar classes for other companies, according to David Kohn, SUNY Orange's Director of Continuing and Professional Education. "This is a perfect example of

an employer identifying a specific need," said Kohn, who cited information the college gleaned last year from several forums with manufacturers that the greatest needs were for basic skills in math and work readiness.

The Manufacturing Institute in Washington, D.C., estimates that the shortage of skilled workers is so severe that it leaves 600,000 jobs unfilled. With the help of SUNY Orange, President Container has discovered a way to fill some of them.