

Cultivating the seeds of success



Jeff Mang (right), HBD Thermoid Plant Manager, with Skip Cranfill, Operations and Materials Manager, and Marie Vanhoy, Human Resource Specialist.

"We've hired ten percent of our workers through the VR SWAT program," Jeff Mang, plant manager of HBD Thermoid, tells a group of business and community leaders during the First Annual Camden Area Business Cookout at the Camden Work Training Center on August 17.

The group includes more than 40 representatives from Lee, Kershaw and Camden counties, who are learning firsthand how VR helps businesses find talented employees through services such as Skilled Workforce Apprenticeship Training (SWAT).

"We make the very best transmission belts for lawn mowers in the world," Mang continues, "and these employees are our top tier performers. They are knowledgeable and excited to come to work."

A VR client may participate in a SWAT for up to 12 weeks. During this time, the client learns the job with assistance from VR staff. It is also an opportunity for the business to evaluate a potential employee's abilities, and a chance for the client to determine if the position is a good match.

"VR has done a tremendous job getting [their clients] ready to join or rejoin the workforce," says an enthusiastic Mang.

Skip Cranfill, Operations and Materials Manager, agrees, "Anyone can have knowledge and skills, but it's attitude and habits that a lot of people are lacking. Our

employees who come from VR have the soft skills and motivation—they are excited to be here. They come in early, they are flexible, willing and capable."

The SWAT also helps employers offset the cost of training for higher skilled jobs. For HBD Thermoid, those savings "go right on the bottom line and actually allowed us to increase the pay rate for our folks," says Marie Vanhoy, Human Resource Specialist.

She explains that the clients they have hired from VR work throughout HBD Thermoid's Elgin plant. "They all start in our warehouse doing packing and shipping. Then we find out what their hidden skills are and they migrate from there to other areas."

Some work in processing, where raw materials are combined to make rubber. One is a lead that steps in to provide guidance or support anywhere in the plant. "His learning curve is disturbingly steep," she says, smiling. "He's cross-trained in every part of our facility. He will work his way into a supervisor position."

Mang appreciates this attention to detail, and the thoroughness of the VR staff in matching them with job-ready candidates who meet their specific needs.

"This is one of the best programs I've ever seen from a government agency," says Mang. "VR is really changing people's lives and helping businesses thrive in the community."

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