



Customized training

VR is developing strong partnerships with local businesses and industries to understand their specific needs, and in turn provide them with job candidates who have the skills and training required by those businesses. To accomplish this, VR is also partnering with technical colleges around the state.

At the Southeastern Institute of Manufacturing and Technology (SiMT), located on the Florence-Darlington Technical College campus, VR clients participate in a one week Manufacturing Skills Pre-employment course. SiMT classes are tailored to meet a business' specific needs. The duration, content, and frequency that a class is offered can be scaled based on business input and the number of students available for the training.

“Students emerge with three credentials that are very valuable for manufacturing employers,” says Lauren Holland, Associate Vice President of Corporate and Workforce Development. “They receive forklift certification, OSHA 10 for general industry, and Six Sigma yellow belt.”

The course has been so successful and popular with employers that it is offered at least once a month.

“VR and local employers know they can count on us to have a pipeline of people coming through this class,” says Holland.

VR clients who complete the course are guaranteed an interview with one or more employers.

“Businesses are benefiting because they're getting candidates for their positions that have the exact skills that they need,” says Susan Courtney, VR Regional Business Development Specialist.

Students participate in the Manufacturing Skills Pre-employment class at the Southeastern Institute of Manufacturing and Technology in Florence.

HM Solutions, Inc

One business taking advantage of the customized training is HM Solutions, which provides industrial manufacturing custodial and recycling services for other industries.

Greg Horne, President of HM Solutions, says that partnering with VR has helped to provide him with a source of qualified, trained, dependable employees.

The first person HM Solutions hired when they came to Florence in 2012 was a VR client, who became their account manager. Since then, they have hired more than 50 VR clients into positions ranging from industrial custodian to recycling technician. “At the recycle plant, skilled employees wear full body protective suits and full face respirators because they are removing lead dust,” explains Courtney.

Joseph Timmons is a former VR client who began as a janitorial custodian and was soon promoted to a shift supervisor.

“A lot of people came in my corner to help me be a supervisor,” says Timmons, who received



Joseph Timmons, former VR client, is a Supervisor at HM Solutions.

training from VR and SiMT. He is grateful for the opportunities he has received and now wants to pass that on to others.

“I’m trying to be the best at what I do to help the next person coming up behind me,” he says.

When Ruiz Foods opened a facility in Florence and began their initial hiring in October of 2015, VR sponsored three clients to go through training. Courtney joined them to experience the training firsthand.

“It benefited me because I knew exactly what Ruiz Foods wanted,” she explains. “I was then able to refer appropriate candidates for the training.”

Ruiz Foods is a family owned business based in California that manufactures frozen Mexican food under the El Monterey brand and convenience store roller grill snacks under the Tornados brand.



Courtney worked with their human resource team to create a training program that included lean manufacturing practices, business specific soft skills, and assessments to help with the selection process.

The result is that Ruiz has been extremely satisfied with the attitude, work ethic, skills and reliability of the VR clients they have hired, many of whom have received multiple promotions.



Freddie Evans, former VR client, is an Operational Supervisor at Ruiz Foods.

Since starting as a packager, former VR client Freddie Evans is now an operational supervisor. “I supervise 266 people, two production lines, two bakeries, a hot kitchen, and a cold kitchen. I make sure all the operations run correctly. And I make sure we make a good, safe product and make sure that people are safe and happy while they’re doing it.”

Courtney says that the customized training was the perfect option for Evans. “It gave him the training and the skills that he needed that could get him in the door.”

Tommy Pruitt, Human Resource Manager at Ruiz Foods, says that the quality of employees they hire from VR is better than those they get through more traditional resources. He states that there are two main reasons for this. “VR clients are pre-screened to

determine if they will be a good match for Ruiz, and the customized training provided the clients with the exact skills we require.”

Six months ago, Courtney took a group of VR clients that had finished the customized training for interviews at Ruiz. When she arrived, Evans greeted her. “I thought he had come to see me,” she says, “I was thrilled to realize he was the one doing the interviewing for his lines!” She beams as she recalls this.

In addition to offering a great supply of talent, other benefits of the partnership between VR and SiMT include reduced training costs, lower turnover, and employees who perform better.



Former VR client Courtney Pech (left), a Quality Assurance Auditor at Ruiz Foods, with Susan Courtney, VR Regional Business Development Specialist.

At Ruiz, Courtney Pech enjoys the team oriented environment. “I played sports in high school, so I’m all about working as a team.”

After graduating from college, Pech ran into barriers finding a job. “VR helped me get WorkKeys testing, which I scored platinum in all three categories, and they offered me the training for Ruiz Foods.”

She was hired as a tortilla thrower, then moved into the bakery, where she quickly mastered the equipment, and then was promoted to a lead position. Soon after, she accepted an opportunity to become a quality assurance auditor.

“Within eight months, she had increased her salary by 68 percent,” says Susan Courtney.

Pech appreciates the training, support and encouragement she received from VR that prepared her for working at Ruiz.

“I’ve definitely found a career within Ruiz foods,” she says. “I don’t see myself leaving.”

Ruiz Foods has hired more than 50 VR clients, and, with the plant expansion they announced last summer, they look forward to hiring many more.