



inspire

Sheboygan

— County —

SPOTLIGHT

Inspire Sheboygan County is a non-profit organization that connects students to career experiences and employers to their future workforce through a variety of activities including, job shadowing, tours, mock interviews, externships, and various work experiences. The Youth Co-Op work experience program has proven to be a successful way for students to get real-life work experience while still in high school, getting both paid and credit for their efforts, while discovering if a specific field is a good match for their skills and interests.

The benefits go both ways, according to Erin Kramer, Human Resource Business Partner at Curt G. Joa, Inc. in Sheboygan Falls. “We’ve found it’s a great way to grow our work force,” she said. JOA

Since 1932, Curt G. Joa, Inc. has been known for innovation in the disposable hygiene industry and has been an Inspire member since 2013.

has been a member of Inspire Sheboygan County for over 5 years now. “Any time the school system or an entity like Inspire Sheboygan County has a program we typically jump on board,” Kramer said, noting the company is very involved in the Youth Apprenticeship Program, job shadowing and Adult Apprenticeship Program. “When Inspire Sheboygan County started the Co-Op Program we were one of the first four companies that started with it,” she said. Kramer said through the nine-week program co-op students at JOA are exposed to a variety of job skills in the Machine Shop including mill and lathes and welding. “So we really try to give them nine weeks of getting their hands dirty in a potential career,” she said.

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The company started with one student the first time Inspire Sheboygan County offered the program. That student eventually went on to take part in the Youth Apprenticeship program at JOA, graduated from high school at which time he was offered a full-time job along with being involved in the Adult Apprenticeship program at Lakeshore Technical College. “He is currently in his second year of the four year Adult Apprenticeship program for being a Machinist,” Kramer said.

During those four apprenticeship years the student takes classes at LTC, works at JOA earning an hourly wage, and has his tuition paid for by the company. At the end of four years, this student will hold a journeyman’s license and will also have zero student loans and a good paying job. “No debt, and he gets paid during these years. It’s a win-win situation,” Kramer said. And this connection was made through participating in Inspire.

Kramer said the beauty of the Co-Op Program is that it gives both the student and the company an opportunity to find out if they would be a good match for each other, all while the student is still in high school. “It’s nine weeks in which we try the employee on for size and they try us on for size,” Kramer said, as well as delving into whether this would be a good career path for the student to follow.

The program has worked out so well for JOA that beginning in January of this school year they have extended the opportunity to co-op in the Assembly Dept. as well as the Machine Shop. “Assembly is both mechanical and electrical as well as pneumatics. So in that co-op role they are hitting different areas and they are doing assembly of a section of the very large machines that we manufacture. They’ll take a schematic

and run the wiring of that part of the machines or they’ll start to build part of the machine, under the direction of a mentor,” Kramer said.

Kramer emphasized that not every student finds that a career at JOA is their match. “That’s O.K.,” she said. “I must say that Inspire and the schools do a really good job in preparing these students. Students come in not only understanding the technical aspects of what they might be asked to do, they understand how to be a good employee by showing up on time and doing what you say you’re going to do. We have found most students

come in ready and some of them are hungry to learn and work.”

Because of these things Kramer said Inspire Sheboygan County has been a great “feeder pool” for the company. “It has allowed us to say to a student, ‘O.K. we feel really comfortable hanging our hat and going with you because we’ve already seen that you can do it,’” she said. “Machining in and of itself is a hard skill to come by in just recruiting, so we take the stance that we have

to build our talent instead of going and finding them and this is a great way to do it. It has been very fruitful for us.”

Kramer highly recommends participating in Inspire. “If you talk to the students we have dealt with as well as the managers who have been a part of it, they’ll tell you it’s totally worth it. You have a fully vetted candidate walking in after nine weeks that you know if you’re willing to spend the resources to continue to grow that person,” she said.

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Erin Kramer, HR Business Partner
JOA