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'Phenomenal' time of year

Holiday cheer is baked into Pulaski bakery's offerings

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"Christmas is pretty phenomenal." That's the way Greg Smurawa, with his big welcoming smile, describes the last month of the year at Smurawa's Country Bakery, 204 E. Pulaski St., Pulaski, that he and his wife, Janice, opened 20 years ago.

Both trained at the Lakeshore Technical College as bakers (that's where the couple met in the 1980s), and as he chatted about life as a small business owner, it suddenly dawned on Greg that 2018 has indeed been a big year for his family and the business.

The Smurawas celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary, the bakery marked its 20th anniversary in Greg's hometown of Pulaski, and the big surprise was being included in the Neville Public Museum's "Our Brown County" exhibit that celebrates the 200th anniversary of Brown County (1818-2018), telling its story through 50 artifacts,

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Greg and Janice Smurawa display some of the Christmas goodies their Pulaski bakery offers along with a package of Polish Paczki. The Business News photo by Nancy Barthel



Therese Pandl

Pandl mentors others so they can excel

Mentoring people who are just beginning their careers as well those people in mid-career is something Therese Pandl, president and CEO of Hospital Sisters Health System (HSBS)-Eastern Wisconsin Division, has been doing for years now.

She said it was the earliest days of her career in healthcare that set the stage for the impact she wants to have on young people, in particular young women, who are entering the field today.

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Meeting recruitment challenges

Pierce Manufacturing, FVTC partnering to build workforce

Finding and hiring the right talent is a challenge for most businesses. Pierce Manufacturing, a manufacturer of fire and rescue apparatus headquartered in Appleton, is no exception. To meet the challenge, it now is accessing a previously untapped segment of the population for its current and future workforce needs.

Pierce Manufacturing is partnering with Fox Valley Technical College (FVTC) to provide training to new hires who are simultaneously working to earn their general education development (GED) certificate while receiving 12 weeks of on-the-job training. The first cohort of these students completed their training at

Pierce Manufacturing the week of Dec. 17 and now have nine months to study for and pass the GED exam.

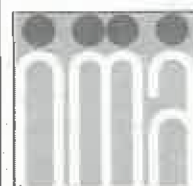
The opportunity was made possible by the Fast Forward Grant that Pierce Manufacturing secured from the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development.

"It's a creative approach to solving our recruitment challenges," said Shane Backhaus, senior human resources manager for Pierce Manufacturing. "We build highly complex, highly cus-

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Shane Backhaus (second from left), senior human resources manager for Pierce, talks with FVTC students.



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Pierce/Students can earn their GED and get a job

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tom vehicles and it's a challenge to find the skilled trades — electricians, metal finishers, etc. — that we need. For anyone to work with us, they need a high school diploma and to be age 18. As a result, there were markets we couldn't explore from a candidacy standpoint."

Brainstorming within the company prompted it to reach out to FVTC's adult education team to bridge this gap. With the grant, the two created a program that provides 12 weeks of 15-hour-a-week classroom instruction at FVTC while participants also work 20 hours a week, earning \$15 per hour, at Pierce Manufacturing. At the end of the 12-week program, and successfully passing their GED testing, they will be hired as full-time team members at Pierce Manufacturing and receive a \$1,000 sign-on bonus.

"We approached FVTC, applied for the Fast Forward Grant, submitted it, went to Madison with our proposal, and within 10 days, received full funding," Backhaus said. "The result is a brand new concept for both parties."

Since there is a lag from finishing the program to taking the GED, Pierce Manufacturing is offering part-time employment to these individuals in that interim. Participants have up to 12 months from the start of the program to complete their GED.

The first group (which Pierce Manufacturing refers to as a cohort) is comprised of younger adults, but there are no age limitations to participate in the program. While there are four in this initial cohort, Backhaus said the ideal number is six to 10. Pierce Manufacturing is committed to putting 60 individuals through the school-to-work program.

Of the initial four individuals, one went to work with the materials handling team and the other three in the paint and metal finish area. Where individuals are assigned is contingent on the company's greatest needs as well as the participants' skill-sets and experience. Today, the company's greatest need is in assembly; Backhaus said they often look to this group to upskill to electricians, but in doing so, that leaves a void.

"As such, we're particularly interested in people with assembly experience and mechanical aptitude," he said.

The next cohort of participants kicks off Jan. 21. All total, Pierce Manufacturing will host six cohorts over a two-year period offering opportunities to work at potentially any of the company's four production facilities in the Appleton area. All total, that offers up 60 candidates for employment alongside the approximately 2,400 people employed at Pierce Manufacturing today.

The participants are paired with a production supervisor who also serves as their mentor, and they work from weekly checklists to ensure employees are assigned appropriate responsibilities and are progressing as they should. Those checklists are aligned with classroom instruction participants receive.

These checklists were developed up-front, said Backhaus, and reflect on-the-job training any employee in that role would receive. All four of the individuals in the first cohort are on track to

obtain their GEDs and to be hired on full-time at Pierce Manufacturing upon successfully passing it. The program is proving to be a key part of Pierce Manufacturing's overarching recruitment efforts, which includes traditional recruitment but also offer a Youth Apprenticeship program and doing purposeful and regular outreach to middle and high school students.

"That's where we're going to catch their attention," Backhaus said. "We're looking to partner with local high schools on their curriculum as well as parents and career advisors that the perception of manufacturing as dark, dirty and dangerous is just not the case. There are lots of opportunities for a sustainable career. We build life-saving

equipment and there's a sense of pride that goes with that on top of offering careers where people can not only put food on the table but to have a 401(k) and other benefits."


While the GED to work program is still in its infancy, Backhaus is heartened by the work ethic of the participants, the depth of the partnership with FVTC and the doors of opportunity this program offers Pierce Manufacturing.

"Short term, we have access to people to do the work while they earn their GED and valuable experience. Longer-term, we help the community. There are about 30,000 people in the Fox Cities who do not have their GED or high school diploma, and that's 30,000 people we can't even con-


sider as potential team members. We can help to lift some of these people out of poverty if they're underpaid or underworking," said Backhaus. "Even longer-term, we hope that our arrangement can become more widespread in the community; that other businesses begin utilizing this approach."

"As Pierce hires individuals who are committed to education (completion of the high school credential and hopefully beyond) and committed to the company who has faith in them, it contributes to the company that has faith in them," said Collette Kolb, associate dean, FVTC's general studies division. "That in turn contributes to our local economy and quality of life."

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