CAWS
CULLMAN AREA WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS

Linking People to Careers
A JOB RESOURCE FOR THE CULLMAN AREA

NOVEMBER 16, 2007

ADS IN THE CAWS SECTION ALSO APPEAR ON THE CULLMAN TIMES’ WEBSITE AT WWW.CULLMANTIMES.COM
Axsys Technologies, Inc., Precision Machined Products, also known as Speedring, LLC, has been producing hardware for the space and defense markets since the beginning of space flight. The company, originally located in Detroit, Michigan, was founded in 1947 by James R. Schiller. In 1967 Mr. Schiller moved his Corporate Offices, along with a sizeable manufacturing operation to Cullman, Alabama. We have been located at 6717 AL Hwy 157 in Cullman since 1974.

Axsys has been involved in some of the most visible, high national priority space and defense programs of the last 50 years. These include programs such as Polaris, Peacekeeper, Trident, Minuteman, Apollo, Defense Support Program, Galileo, Space Shuttle, and (more recently) LANTIRN, Global Hawk, F/A-22, IFTS, MA12, Bradley, Mars Explorer, Exo-atmospheric Kill Vehicle (EKV), James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) and several National Missile Defense programs.

Because of our commitment to excellence in all aspects of our business; from financial growth, customer satisfaction, community service and employee involvement, in 2004 the Alabama Technology Network and the Business Council of Alabama named Axsys Technologies PMP the Alabama Medium-Sized Manufacturer of the Year.

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- Total Compensation Package $61,390.00

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CAWS Partners Head Back To School for 2007-08 Career Awareness Fairs

The Cullman Area Workforce Solution (CAWS) Partnership has launched a newer, more “up close and personal” version of the traditional Career Awareness Fair this year, according to group leaders.

In past years, the Career Awareness Fair has been held once a year at the Cullman Civic Center. This year, however, CAWS is bringing the event to the students by visiting the campuses of all local schools to spread the word about career and training opportunities in the Cullman area.

According to Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce President Kirk Mancer, a member of the CAWS steering committee, the goals behind the career Awareness Fairs are threefold.

“By going in to the area schools and meeting with the students, we hope to help the students learn more about potential job opportunities right here in the Cullman area,” Mancer said. “We also want to present to them the educational requirements for those jobs, and help them realize the importance of — at a minimum — completing their high school education as well.”

On the day of each session, the event begins with a brief overview explaining the purpose for the event. Students then spend the remainder of the fair meeting with representatives from local businesses, industries, educational institutions and career training providers, with groups of students rotating between the participating companies in timed intervals.

During the fair events, which last approximately 45 minutes per group, each student receives an assignment sheet and is encouraged to ask questions about the companies with whom they are meeting. At the conclusion of the fair, each student is presented with a Career Awareness Guide that provides vital information on the participating companies, including a brief history or description of the company, the types of jobs available at the company, educational requirements necessary for those jobs, and the salary range available for an employee working in that position.

Career Awareness Guides are also made available to the participating school’s guidance counselors and teachers so they can have a better understanding of area companies when discussing student’s goals with them.

Three fair events have been held this year at Good Hope, West Point, and Holly Pond High Schools. More fairs are scheduled at area schools for early 2008.

“The results and feedback thus far have been extremely positive,” Mancer said. “According to student surveys completed at the conclusion of the fairs, students are learning more about local companies, and, in some cases, are finding out what they do and don’t want to do in the future.”

See Career Awareness Fair Continue on Page 9
Cullman Area Workforce Solutions’ Students Focus Group will soon be implementing a new program aimed at lowering dropout rates and giving high school freshmen a better perspective on real-world living.

The program is called “Keeping It Real.” Although the program was originally initiated late last year by the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce Adult Leadership Class of 2006, the program has recently been adopted under the CAWS banner and will soon be expanded to reach even more local students, according to CAWS Students Focus Group Leader Caroline Thompson.

Modeled after the award-winning “Reality Check” program created by the Chattanooga Chamber of Commerce, Keeping It Real provides students with a chance to learn real-life money management skills through interaction with community volunteers who man booths representing institutions such as higher education, secondary employers, grocers, retail and vehicle vendors, banks, insurance companies and even daycare facilities. Students are assigned a job and family situation and must learn how to budget for the necessities of life.

Thompson, Human Resources Supervisor at Topre America, was not only part of the leadership class that started the program but also suggested the program to the Chamber Leadership group as a potential project and was instrumental in its planning and implementation. Thompson said, “Students are assigned a family, job and income, and through their interaction with students in a fun but learning environment,”

connections between education, career choice and income, and gives students an idea of what it is like out in the real world.”

The Chamber’s Leadership Class held two sessions of Keeping It Real prior to the adoption of the program by CAWS. The first, a mock session held at the Chamber’s downtown commerce center, was attended by the senior class of Vinemont High School for the purposes of troubleshooting and evaluating the program. The second session was held at Vinemont High School and was attended by the program’s actual target audience, high school freshmen.

“The plan was always to find Keeping It Real a home with a local civic organization,” said Chamber Leadership Class 2006 President Jason White. “I think that CAWS is a strong, motivated group and will take the program to the next level. They are the perfect people to host Keeping It Real.”

CAWS Vice-Chair and Student Focus Group member Dan Plank, Human Resources Director for Rehau, was originally slated to observe the second session of Keeping It Real but ended up being an active participant, manning a booth for the duration of the session.

“I really enjoyed it, and I think the students did, too,” Plank said. “The Keeping It Real program is a fun way for them to learn real world lessons by acting out real world situations. The decisions they make in this program are designed to open their eyes to the kind of decisions

See “Keeping It Real” Continued on Page 9
Automotive Manufacturing Technology

associate degree

The Automotive Manufacturing Technology degree at Wallace State Community College is designed to prepare students for employment and advancement in the fast-growing field of automotive manufacturing. Positions exist both in the automobile manufacturing plants and in the many supplier organizations statewide.

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program requirements

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degree requirements

Students completing the AUT degree will complete 75 semester hours.

courses

Students are required to complete courses in: Safety and Lean Manufacturing, Electronics, Programmable Logic Controllers (PLCs), Industrial Sensors, Blue Print Reading, Hydraulic and Pneumatics, Industrial Controls, Machining, Robotics, Welding and other technical courses.

career opportunities

Students completing the AUT degree may seek employment with companies such as Honda, Hyundai, International Diesel, Mercedes, Toyota, or the more than 350 automotive suppliers located in the state of Alabama.

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“This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. DUE-0501328.”

New Production Supervisor at American Proteins chalks success up to hard work, willingness to learn

Whitney “Red” Orgeron did not attend a four-year college. Unlike some of his colleagues at American Proteins in Hanceville, he has not spent a lifetime in the business of processing and rendering poultry by-products into food for livestock and household pets.

A former oil field worker from Franklin, Louisiana, Orgeron moved to Cullman County in 1993. He worked in several different fields before successfully applying for a job with American Proteins. Beginning with his promotion in September, Orgeron now has between seven and 14 men under him, depending on the shift and day of the week, and is responsible for overseeing the plant’s production during his shift.

According to the men who are responsible for Orgeron’s rise from production employee to a supervisory position, the most important factors involved were hard work, knowledge gained on the job and leadership ability.

Keith Little, Plant Manager at American Proteins for the last year, said Orgeron showed tremendous promise when given the chance to lead.

See New Production Supervisor
Continued on Page 10

Whitney “Red” Orgeron was recently promoted to the position of Production Supervisor at American Proteins in Hanceville.
The Workforce Investment Act and CareerLink programs at the Alabama Career Center in Cullman have helped many local students find well-paying jobs with local businesses and industries by providing financial assistance and career counseling services.

One such student who has benefited from the tuition assistance program offered at Cullman CareerLink is Chris Goodwin of Good Hope. Goodwin, originally from Jasper, Ala., moved to Cullman County and attended Good Hope High School, where he played basketball, graduated in the top 10 of his class and was voted most likely to succeed. Like many high school students, however, he was faced with the daunting task of trying to find a way to pay for college.

“I found out about the CareerCenter in Cullman from a friend,” Goodwin said. “He told me they gave him money to pay for college, fees and books.”

At the Alabama Career Center, Chris attended a WIA orientation where he met Kelley Taylor, a Youth Facilitator with the North Alabama Skills Consortium, an organization that operates in partnership with the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) and the Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education.

“With the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) tuition assistance program Chris was eligible to receive grant money for college through an Individual Training Account (ITA),” said Taylor. “ITA’s goal is to increase the employment and earnings potential of youth through the attainment of a certification or two-year degree. We do our best to set up the youth in our area for success.”

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“Keeping It Real”

Continued from Page 4

they will have to make as adults. It teaches students the value of staying in school and developing skills to enable them to earn more money and be able to afford the things life throws at us.”

According to Thompson, the program is helpful not only to the students themselves, but to the volunteers, who are able to interact with students in an environment that would not normally exist in the workplace, hopefully making a positive impression that will endure beyond the classroom.

“We have received nothing but positive feedback from the schools, the students and the volunteers who have participated,” Thompson said. “It’s great because the students and business and industry leaders are able to interact in a fun, instructive situation devoid of the pressures that would exist in a job interview or a lecture-type environment.

“It’s structured like a game, but both the students and the volunteers take it seriously, and I think it’s a chance for them to learn about each other. The impact of that interaction on our future workforce is another reason this program is such a good fit for CAWS and their mission.”

Thompson said the Keeping It Real program is part of a comprehensive student plan that will target all grade levels. She explained that one reason Keeping It Real was chosen as the pilot project for the CAWS Student Focus Group is the age of the students targeted.

“Ninth grade usually has the highest dropout rate,” Thompson said. “This is where most students make the decision whether or not to finish their high school education. When I first heard about Chattanooga’s program, I realized that the students in our county would greatly benefit from having programs like these in the schools. If we can reach them at this crucial time and convince them to stay in school, it will benefit not only the students but local employers as well.”

Thompson said the current plan is for CAWS to implement Keeping It Real throughout the county and city schools in 2008. Programs targeted at other grade levels are to follow.

“We hope that the student programs being planned by CAWS can become a positive influence in students’ lives,” Thompson said. “The programs start as early as sixth grade and follow students throughout their high school education. Keeping It Real is just one of the ways that CAWS hopes to make finding a career path easier for students.”

Thompson added that CAWS is still finalizing dates for the Keeping It Real program with area schools but that the schedule will be posted on the CAWS website at www.cullmancareers.com when finished.

Persons wishing to participate as a volunteer in an upcoming session of Keeping It Real are urged to contact Caroline Thompson at 256-735-2619.

Career Awareness Fairs

Continued from Page 3

“Another encouraging sign is their thirst for more information. The surveys are also full of suggestions on other types of businesses and industry they’d like to learn more about. This information will be helpful to us in planning future fairs and making them even more effective for the students and local employers as well.”

The Career Awareness Fairs program is part of CAWS’ multi-tiered approach to workforce development here in the Cullman area. Other CAWS programs include: the Educator Exchange Awards Program, a newly formed Speakers Bureau, the “Keeping It Real” program, and tours of local industries.

For additional information on the Career Awareness Fairs, please contact Kirk Mancer at the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce by calling 734-0454 or by e-mail at kmancer@cullmanchamber.org

CAWS Steering Committee members present a check for $10,200 to Becky Eason of the Cullman Area Career Center. The funds will be used to expand and upgrade the school’s carpentry and building construction technology programs. Pictured are Dan Plank of Rehau; Suzanne Harbin of Wallace State College; Rep. Neal Morrison; Becky Eason; Don Willoughby of Alabama Career Center Cullman; Dale Greer of the Cullman Economic Development Agency; Judy Bradford of Axsys Technologies; and Perry Shields of the Alabama Technology Network Center at Wallace State.

Career Awareness Fair Participants (To Date)
The following Cullman area companies and organizations have participated thus far:
American Proteins, Inc.
Axsys Technologies
Cullman Regional Medical Center
Louisiana Pacific Corporation
REHAU, Incorporated
SUMMA Technology
Topre America Corporation
Wal-Mart Distribution
Wallace State
Community College
Cullman Area Career Center
Alabama State Employment
New Production Supervisor
Continued from Page 6

“When I came in, we needed a fresh new supervisor as our older supervisor was about to retire,” Little said. “Red really knew the plant well, and, when given the opportunity, he was a leader. We promoted him to relief supervisor trainee, meaning he took over when someone called in sick or had vacation, to see how he handled it. He has done very well.” Orgeron said his training has come mostly on the job and that he has learned much from studying manuals and booklets on the various equipment used in the production process. Also, he credits the cooperative nature of the plant environment and the spirit of teamwork at American Proteins for allowing him the chance to enter the role of supervisor.

“My knowledge of the plant mostly came from Randy Loggins, my former supervisor who showed me a lot,” Orgeron said. “That’s what I tell these other guys, now. I’ll show you whatever you need to learn to become a better operator. That’s one of the things I like about being a supervisor. It gives me an opportunity to learn more and to help the other guys learn, too.”

Orgeron said he enjoys the challenge of the work as well, as keeping production operating at peak levels often requires an intimate knowledge of the mechanics of each machine on the plant floor and the ability to troubleshoot them at a moment’s notice.

“Youth Training
Continued from Page 7

WIA funded training scholarships are available each year for individuals to acquire skills that are currently in demand. To qualify, an applicant must be in need of training services to enter/re-enter labor force and must also have skills that are no longer in demand, have low-wage job skills, or little to no work history.

“At the Alabama Career Center, Kelly set me up on a test to assess my reading and math skills, interests, aptitudes and employability skills,” said Goodwin. “They prepared me for the COMPASS placement test that I was required to take in order to attend Wallace State Community College (WSCC) in Hanceville.”

“We have the best adult education program in the state” said Sandra Rhodes, Coordinator of the Cullman CareerLink. “Carolyn Hendrix, our Adult Education Coordinator, has more than 15 years of experience in Adult Education and is compassionate about education.”

Rhodes also said that the services provided by her office, including testing, are free to the public.

According to Goodwin, the services rendered by the Alabama Career Center continue past placement in a local post-secondary program. Now a student at Wallace State, Goodwin is counseled by Joyce Cordes in Financial Aid.

“They continued to work with me even after I left the Career Center,” Goodwin said. “They make sure I stay on course with my studies, and are helping to make sure I succeed. I have even made the President’s List.”

Goodwin will graduate from Wallace State with an Associates Degree in Applied Science in Drafting and Design Technology. Following graduation, he plans to pursue a career in structural or civil engineering.

“It is definitely a challenge,” he said. “There’s a lot of stuff going on here and you have to figure out how to keep everything running smoothly … the dryers, cookers, presses, evaporators. You find out something you didn’t know almost every night.”

Aside from the specifics of the job, Orgeron said he enjoys working for American Proteins as the company treats its workers well.

“I love working for them,” he said. “They are a family-oriented company. Fred [Cespedes] is a very good boss, and anytime you have family matters, they’re understanding and work with the employees. They’re a great company with great benefits and they’re close to home. The money is here, if you work hard and learn the job.”

Keith Little added that he, like Orgeron, does not possess a four-year degree, but that American Proteins is a company that values individual skills and abilities as much as an advanced education.

“I started out in this business working maintenance, and I’ve held general manager and plant manager positions in the past,” Little said. “Knowledge of the plant, people skills and knowledge of the personnel is very important to us. A college education is helpful, but knowledge of the plant and operations gained on the job is as qualifying as education.”

“It’s all in how you apply yourself, and that’s what Red has done. He earned his position.”

For more information on American Proteins, visit their website at www.americanproteins.com.

Adult Education and ESL Classes Continue

HANCEVILLE, AL— The Adult Education Department at Wallace State Community College in Hanceville prepares unemployed and underemployed individuals for the workforce and for postsecondary education. Wallace State Adult Education offers GED, workforce skills, and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes free of charge.

Adult Education classes are offered day and evening, in Cullman, Blount, southeastern Morgan and Winston counties. Classes are offered year-round.

Students in the Adult Education program may arrange class times convenient to their schedule. Regular attendance is encouraged to ensure success, but students may attend the program as much or as little as their situation permits. Online classes are available to those who qualify. Students 19 years and under who have not yet completed their high school diploma are required by the state to attend GED classes as a stipulation for retaining their driver’s license. Pre-registration is not required.

This program is funded through the United States Department of Education and the Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education.

For more information or to enroll in the program, call 256/352-8077, 256/352-8078 or 1-866-350-9722.
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