

## KY FAME helps Pulaski students and companies succeed in the manufacturing industry

BY TIM MINTON  
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Studies show that manufacturing still plays a crucial role in Kentucky's economy despite the recent challenges of job losses. However, the manufacturing jobs in demand across the Commonwealth want employees with educational training and skilled-labor experience.

The Kentucky Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education (KY FAME) aims to train and employ manufacturing job-seekers. The collaborative partnership involves state manufacturers, community colleges and the public sector.

"It's an apprentice-style program for students while they go to college," says Chris Hicks. "They attend classes two days during the week and work at a sponsoring com-



UGN personnel (from left) include Shawn Cruise, Lauren Wesley, Ryan Shanks, Chris Hicks, Jacob Swope, Stevie McWhorter and Mitchell Speaks.

pany for two days." "It gives them the opportunity to combine education with practical work experience," he continues. "After they graduate, they have almost two years of hands-on work experience with their sponsoring company."

Hicks serves as the vice president on the board for the Lake Cumberland chapter of KY FAME. He is also the plant manager at

UGN, 1270 Hwy. 3057, Somerset.

As a KY FAME sponsoring company, UGN and 11 other Pulaski manufacturing companies help provide part-time, hands-on experience in manufacturing for Somerset Community College (SCC) students working toward an associate's in Advanced Manufacturing Technician (AMT).

Once completing the SCC program,

students are ready to enter the workforce and gain full-time employment opportunities with their sponsoring companies. The collaborative effort between Kentucky manufacturers and colleges helps prepare a skillful workforce ensuring economic success for the Commonwealth.

Altogether, KY FAME has 125-member companies, 10 partnering colleges, and an employment rate of 98 percent of students who graduate from the program.

As a local office holder of KY FAME, Hicks continues to see the benefits it offers to Kentuckians seeking high-skilled, manufacturing jobs.

Five of the eight UGN employees who are either former or current participants in KY FAME include Mitchell Speaks, Jacob Swope, Shawn Cruise, Ryan Shanks and Lauren Wesley.

Speaks, Swope and Cruise are former graduates of KY FAME and presently work full time. Likewise, Shanks and Wesley are current SCC students gaining their AMT degree and work part time.

Hicks relays that



Lauren Wesley

former students like Swope, Speaks and Cruise had the advantage of on-the-job training while attending college. Now, they are full-time employees.

Swope is a 2010 SCC graduate and a process engineer at UGN. He continues working there since graduation.

"I have seen the benefit of KY FAME," he says. "When I help train the students who come in now, I try to explain how what they're learning in school can be applied here."

Speaks is a former

participant in KY FAME who is a 2017 SCC graduate. He is a process specialist at UGN.

"I think it is a great way for students to get into the industry," he says. "Once you graduate from the program, you have skills that you can use."

Cruise is the manufacturing services manager at UGN. Though he is a new employee there, he helps coordinate KY FAME since he worked with the program at his previous job.

"There is not a deep pool of skilled labor for manufacturing in Kentucky," he says. "This program helps fill the gap of talent that companies struggle to find."

Additionally, Hicks shares that current SCC students, like Shanks and Wesley in the AMT program, are getting to work with leading and cutting-edge technology.

"I can take what I learn at school and turn around and apply it here," Wesley says. "I get to work with great technology."

Shanks is another student who is a recent part-time hire at UGN.

"I like working here," he says. "I think the hands-on experience I'm get-

ting is really going to help me."

"It's an opportunity for students to get on a career pathway in manufacturing," Hicks says. "For companies that are wanting to relocate or get started in Kentucky, it is a great (incentive) for them, too."

Hicks not only sees the benefits for students and future employees. He also recognizes KY FAME ensures a pipeline of highly-skilled workers remains available to participating manufacturing companies. The results can warrant ongoing economic success for Kentucky's manufacturing industry.

Stevie McWhorter, human resource safety manager at UGN, relays how KY FAME benefits them.

"We were actually having a shortage of skilled-labor workers," she says. "It helps us build an apprentice program where they get hands-on training."

"It not only allows them to get their education through SCC, they learn our procedures and get that experience," she continues.

"When they do graduate, they are essentially hitting-the-ground-running."



Ryan Shanks



Mitchell Speaks