



NEWS RELEASE

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WOODMARK'S HELPING HAND LETS WORKERS STEP UP AT EASTERN

“There are quite a few things that qualify one of our employees for a promotion,” said Faron Shanholtz, Human Resources manager at American Woodmark’s Moorefield plant. “And getting a college degree is a tremendous step in the right direction.”

The local wood products manufacturer, with three plants in Hardy County alone, puts a high priority on upgrading their workers’ qualifications through higher education. And management at the company backs up that belief with dollars: they offer a tuition reimbursement program to all employees.

The funding covers not only college tuition, but also books and all other required educational aids, such as CD’s or internet charges. “With this program, for every class where they earn an ‘A’ or ‘B’,” Shanholtz noted, “we’re paying the complete bill. It’s 100-percent reimbursement.”

At a West Virginia community college, where tuition usually runs lower than at four-year schools, that amount of support can pay for two semesters of fulltime studies each year. “We’re very pleased with the progress and accomplishments of our students who take advantage of this employee program,” said Seyed Mirkhani, Academic Program Director for Business Technologies at Eastern WV Community and Technical College. “Some of them choose to carry a full course load, while others prefer to study part-time.”

Several learners from American Woodmark have enrolled in Eastern’s business management program, Mirkhani noted, while “others have chosen to study for the Leadership Apprenticeship occupational development associate degree.”

Credits Transfer Easily

In both of those programs, students take classes directly related to management issues, such as Human Resources Management and Organizational Behavior, Mirkhani explained, and they study Marketing and Accounting, too. “From a leadership point-of-view, they learn to understand what’s in the minds and needs of customers, who play such a vital role for managers,” he said. “And for a company like American Woodmark, accounting is an important management tool.”

Mirkhani also noted that Eastern has structured its programs, including the associate in arts (AA) and associate in science (AS) general studies tracks, to make it easy for students to transfer later to a four-year program, if they so wish. And that option has drawn the attention of at least one American Woodmark employee who, thanks to the tuition reimbursement program, recently earned her degree at Eastern.

“I first started at American Woodmark as an hourly worker in finishing,” said Dana Coleman, who now serves as Training Manager at the Moorefield plant. “I painted cabinets.” She learned about the company’s tuition reimbursement program at her pre-hire interview. “I knew I wanted to study business,” she recalled, “and they encouraged me to get further education.”

Ten years after her last experience in a formal classroom, and seven years after earning her high school GED, Coleman signed up for one college class at Eastern in

spring semester of 2004. "And by the time I finished, I was taking pretty much a fulltime load." Taking between 12 and 15 credits for most of her Eastern semesters, Coleman also studied during two summer sessions, and all the while holding down a fulltime job at American Woodmark and raising two daughters at home. Last spring, she earned an associate in applied science (AAS) degree in Business Management.

Earns Promotions

"Woodmark not only reimbursed one-hundred percent of my tuition," Coleman pointed out, "they were also flexible about my work hours." And that flexibility smoothed the path to her college success, she said. Along the way, in part because management valued her seriousness about setting and achieving the goal of college learning, the company promoted Coleman twice.

"It's not only the degree credentials that matter," Coleman acknowledged. "Your initiative in gaining more knowledge and advancing your education means a lot too."

She now plans to return to Eastern in the spring, and then to follow-up by entering the last two years of a four-year program offered in partnership with Potomac State College, which will transfer all of the credits from her Eastern degree. "And now, even before I've started on that process," she said, "I know that I want to go on for my master's. It doesn't matter how old you are or how much experience you have—learning something new is a good thing."

Adam Landry, now of Augusta, agrees. As a member of the general labor pool, he started on the production line at American Woodmark right after graduating Petersburg High School. "I went there because it was one of the better jobs in the area," Landry acknowledged, "with more pay and good benefits."

Career-Oriented Learning

After pulling doors on the shipping department's second shift for two and a half years, and then returning to a day shift paint line team, Landry decided to make use of one of those benefits. "It's a pretty good place to work," he noted, "but I need to find a career. So I started at Eastern in the fall of 2006," five years after finishing high school, "taking two classes. Now I'm taking three classes each semester, doing the associate in arts (AA) degree," he said.

"I'm getting most of my basic general studies classes out of the way. Then I might have to transfer those credits to a four-year program." Originally thinking about going into the veterinary field, Landry now has set his sights on a career in either computers or nursing.

"In his state of the state message last January, Governor Manchin emphasized the value of education, and the importance of getting a college degree," noted Robert 'Buck' Eagle, Eastern's Dean for Academic and Learner Support Services. "We at Eastern, along with our partners at American Woodmark, strongly endorse that insight. And together we are making it work in the Potomac Highlands."

For more information about Eastern's financial aid opportunities, programs of study and workforce and community education, and learner support services, call toll free: 877-982-2322; or check the College's website: "www.eastern.wvnet.edu".

Serving the residents of Grant, Hampshire, Hardy, Mineral, Pendleton and Tucker counties, Eastern West Virginia Community and Technical College is a comprehensive and equal opportunity community and technical college bringing the resources and assets of Education That Works to the families, communities and employers of the Potomac Highlands.