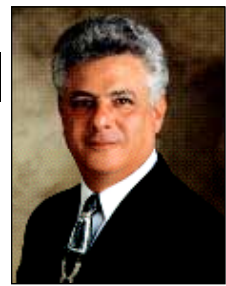


Greenhouse of the Gear Industry



According to the calendar, it's been spring for more than a month now, but here in Chicago, it's been hard to tell. Sure, we've had a few warm, sunny days, but with snowfalls well into the middle of April, it seemed as though winter would never relax its grip. Now, it seems we've finally turned the corner. We're still waiting for the sun to come out, but at least the snow has turned to rain.

With the weather so uncertain, it's hard to get your garden started. First, you have to wait for the danger of frost to pass. Then you either have to brave the deluge or find a day when it's nice enough to plant. If you're not careful, you could miss the growing season altogether. That's why many gardeners like to get a jump-start on spring by planting seeds indoors before the weather breaks. Some even use a greenhouse, because new plants need the right conditions, the right nurturing and the right timing.

Young people are like plants in that way. They too, need nurturing—and we can't always wait for the timing to be right in order to plant the seeds.

In March, Forest City Gear received a visit from a young person interested in manufacturing. In this case, the visitor was 13-year-old Alexi Cluff, accompanied by her grandfather Brian Cluff, vice president of Star-SU. They visited Forest City Gear to learn about career options in manufacturing.

Alexi Cluff is one of 48 students enrolled in a program sponsored by a grant from the Motorola Foundation and conducted at the College of Engineering and Engineering Technology at Northern Illinois University. The program is a workshop in partnership with NIU-Enhanced Engineering Pathways, the Society of Women Engineers and the Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois. Girls in the program are mentored by women engineering professors and



women engineers from a variety of industries, and they often take tours of manufacturing facilities to absorb "real world" experiences.

Forest City Gear owners Fred and Wendy Young went out of their way to give Alexi as much exposure as possible, including a tour of all departments of the company. They arranged a roundtable discussion with women from these departments, including application engineering, human resources, gear grinding, gear deburring, gear hobbing, order processing, estimating, expediting, procurement, materials inspection, quality validation, machine setup and company management.

Although Alexi Cluff obviously has an interest in engineering and manufacturing, I believe there has always existed a certain percentage of young people that are naturally curious about the way things work, and we're not doing enough to engage those young people and make them aware of the rewarding possibilities of working in a manufacturing environment.

If we can make available to these young people more opportunities to see what goes on in a manufacturing environment, we can give them an outlet for their natural curiosity that isn't being stimulated by their parents, teachers and counselors.

Those of us who work in manufacturing can probably agree that our

country already has enough lawyers, bankers and financial wizards. In the past, those were viewed as prestigious and desirable career paths. Although they may seem less desirable following the most recent financial crisis, we're not doing enough to convince people that careers in manufacturing and engineering can be rewarding, both personally and financially.

So what are you doing to encourage young people in manufacturing careers? What student groups have you invited to tour your facility?

Have you approached the local Boy Scout or Girl Scout troop? What about the local schools and youth groups?

Not only do you have the opportunity to encourage young people to consider a career in manufacturing, but also you can expose them and their adult leaders to the many possible jobs where they could satisfy their natural curiosity about how things work, as well as earn a good living. Just as importantly, our country needs to maintain these important skills.

With the manufacturing recovery underway, you're all probably very busy, and you might not think you have time for taking on extra projects. But if not now, then when? Nobody wants to take on extra projects when business is bad. We're all too busy trying to improve our business. But we can't afford to wait until the weather breaks. Each of your facilities is like a greenhouse for the gear industry—a place where you can plant the seeds of a manufacturing future, a place where you can nurture those seeds and help them grow. There are a lot of kids out there like Alexi Cluff who could benefit from such a place. What can you do to provide it?

Michael Goldstein

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