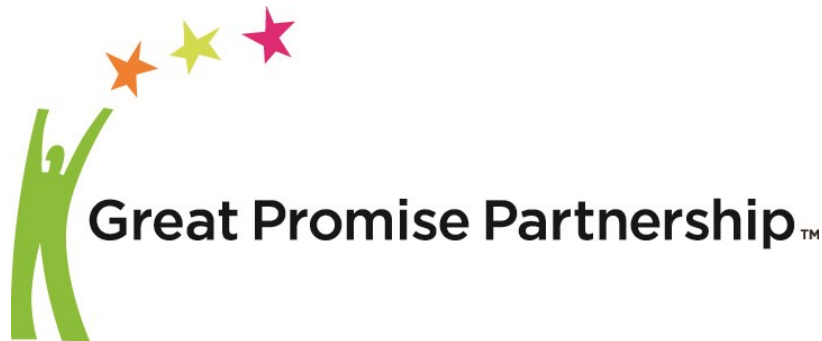


faces  of **MANUFACTURING**  
*in Georgia*

April 2016



## ‘It’s good for the kids and good for the company’

Beaulieu, a leading floor covering manufacturer, headquartered in Dalton, Georgia, has a long history of supporting education throughout Northwest Georgia, where 13 of their company’s plants are located. Additionally, the company encourages its team members to develop creative solutions both inside and outside of their plants.

Four years ago Angie Ledford, talent development coordinator at Beaulieu, did just that. She approached her management team with an idea – to fill open jobs at the company with high school students that were in jeopardy of not graduating.

Ledford said, “This was not a hard sell to our team. I had people raising their hands asking how they could help.” For Beaulieu, the reward was two-fold: The company could help kids stay in school, while giving them a job in the afternoon. In addition, Beaulieu could fill multiple job openings, while building their team member pipeline for the future.

## ‘It takes a partnership between the companies and the schools to make the program a success’

Ledford reached out to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to learn more about the Great Promise Partnership (GPP), an initiative to help at-risk students complete their high school education while gaining -real-world job skills, which was based on Southwire’s 12 for Life™ program. “We wanted



to replicate the success Southwire was having, but make it scalable and accessible to other companies in the state, said Merrill Wilcox, a GPP site coordinator. “Gov. (Nathan) Deal gave us the green light, stating the program would help alleviate poverty, drive workforce development, increase graduation rates, and support the local communities and companies.”

Ledford then contacted the Dalton Public Schools and the Bartow County School System. With the support of those superintendents, she was connected with the local high schools – Morris Innovative High School and the Bartow County College & Career Academy and Adairsville High School to begin discussions about a partnership. The team met with Dr. Paul Sabin, Bartow County College & Career Academy principal, Bruce Mulkey, Adairsville High’s principal, and Wilcox, of the GPP. Mulkey said, “We started the conversation and you could tell we all had the willingness to make this program work. For every obstacle, such as transportation and scheduling, that came up during the meeting, we worked together to develop a solution.”

Once all parties were ready to move forward, Beaulieu interviewed students for the program. Frank Hutchinson, manager of the sample department, sat in on the initial interview committee. “It’s unbelievable what these teens are going through,” Hutchinson said, recalling his first meetings with the students. “Instead of attending school, they have chosen to work to keep the lights on at their house, pay their family bills, and buy medicine for their parents. These are kids that are taking on responsibilities as if they are adults.” He added, “We even had one student, who at the time was washing floors at a restaurant to earn money, walk across town in 90-degree weather to the interview because he knew this job would give him the opportunity to gain skills and have steady work and income.”

These interviews solidified the Beaulieu team’s initial thoughts: That this program could transform the lives of kids in their community.

**‘None of these jobs are made up. These are all real open positions that the kids are filling’**

The next step for Beaulieu was to get the plants and jobs ready for the teens to start work. The company had multiple positions to fill within three processes in the facilities. Beaulieu paired the students in teams and had them working on sorting yarn in the tufting department, sorting yarn into color groups and polymer types in the



shipping and receiving department, and packaging carpet tiles into orders. Chris Turner, director of operations at the Adairsville plant said, “We integrated these kids right into our teams in each of these departments.”

Josh, one of the students at the Adairsville plant, said the company set high expectations. “What surprised me the most about this program and Beaulieu was how much responsibility we’d have and how much they really trusted us to do our jobs and jobs that mattered to the company,” he said. “They put a lot of faith in us.”

Added Jonathan, a student in the Dalton plant: “Since I started I’ve had the chance to work in three different departments and it’s helping to build my skills and my resume.”

After a few months, Turner was pleasantly surprised at the effect the students were having on the plant. They even began making suggestions that improved processes, saving time and money for the company.



‘At the beginning, they couldn’t look us in the eye. Now they are beaming with confidence.’

The Beaulieu team members knew they would be employing students who were going through real struggles at home, had attendance issues at school, and were on the brink of dropping out. “When these students arrived at the plant the first day, they wouldn’t look any of us in the eye,” said Steve Foubert, the Adairsville plant

manager. “We’ve worked hard to provide them with an environment conducive to not only learning about manufacturing, but also about self-growth.” The Beaulieu plants regularly host classes on cooking, gardening, and other life skills that the kids attend. They also attend accountability and work ethic discussions, as well, like other Beaulieu team members.

Upon arrival, each student, is assigned a mentor at the facility. Chris Storey, one of the mentors, meets with his mentee each week to discuss needs at work and at home.

Johnathan said, “My mentor asks me how my day is going. We’ve learned a lot about each other and he’s taught me how to become a leader.” Elizabeth, a student at the Dalton plant said her mentor has helped her apply for scholarships, while Wilmer, another student in the program, said he appreciates that it’s a two-way relationship – in that his mentor also opens up to him and shares his story too, as it gives them a deeper connection.

As the year has progressed, the Beaulieu team members beam when they talk about the dramatic difference. Foubert said, “You can just see their confidence growing. Not only do they look at us, but we now have real conversations.” Brian Moura, the warehouse manager in Adairsville, echoed those sentiments, “At home they don’t have a lot of control with what is going on in their lives. But here it’s different – we’ve given them real responsibilities in the plant and they just grab hold and don’t want to let go – it gives them an opportunity to make a difference and an outlet to control something in their life.”

‘We underestimated the affect these kids would have on us’

Ledford said, “When we started this program we hoped it would make a difference in their lives.”

Added Turner, “But we never imagined the impact they would have on us.”

Turner shared the story of a security guard who works at the Adairsville plant. “He has stopped me before to tell me the highlight of his day is

watching the Bartow county school bus bring kids to work at the plant,” Turner said.

Turner has even taken the next step – by being involved in this program, he realized he could make an even larger difference and has since joined the school improvement counsel in Adairsville. He is also an advocate of partnering other manufacturing companies in the area with local school systems.



This program was uncharted territory for Beaulieu. Five years ago, they didn't fully know what they were signing up for, but today they are preparing for five years from now – where they'll have more of their plants involved in the program and take on more students.



‘These kids are now talking about their futures’

Sheila McKeehan, school counselor at Morris Innovative High School said the program has led to some dramatic changes in the students' school lives. “Last year, we had a student miss 30 days of school in just one semester. Since getting involved in this program, this student has missed just three days,” she said. “We’ve had such success with the program that we

have kids lining up to be involved — our school has 20 students in the program, 10 at Beaulieu and 10 at another manufacturing plant in the area.”

Kyle, a student in the program said, “Before working here, I thought manufacturing was people working by themselves. Instead it’s about people working together to create products. I’ve learned teamwork, responsibility, and how to communicate with others.”

Toby, another student explained that for him, he’s learned to trust others. Elizabeth added, “It’s impacted our attendance in school, our grades, our lives, and our future.”

These same kids who less than a year ago were on the verge of dropping out of high school have grown in ways they never imagined and are now making big plans for their future.

Christian, who graduated from high school and the GPP program in May 2015, is still employed by Beaulieu. “My first day in the program I was nervous. I had applied for other jobs in the past but never got a call back. It took me a few weeks to feel like I belonged, but I discovered how to work with others, gained confidence, and learned not to quit in the middle of things. I also became very interested in manufacturing and I now work for Beaulieu as a full-time forklift driver.”

Mulkey, the Adairsville High School principal, said the changes have been amazing, “The impact of this program has been tremendous on these kids. Before, they were disengaged. Now, they are passing their classes, taking lead roles on projects, and changing their lives.” Kellen Cloud, lead counselor, echoed Mulkey’s statement, “We have two students that will be graduating this year that would not have been eligible had it not been for this program.”

‘You can help break the cycle for these kids too – find a program that works for your company’

Currently in its third year of the program, Beaulieu has had 20 kids working in its three participating plants, filling open jobs where there was a tremendous need. “We are breaking the cycle. They are no longer struggling to stay afloat, but instead are improving in school and are excited to come to work every day, build their skills, and earn a steady paycheck,” Ledford said. “They also talk up the program to their friends and by doing so are helping to market it organically in their schools.”

That’s how Josh, a student at the Adairsville plant, learned about it and joined. “I’ve been friends with Aubrey for a long time. I saw him going through the program and saw the impact it was making on him, and decided I wanted to be a part of it, too.”

Wilcox, site coordinator for GPP said Beaulieu has been a great partner. “They are in it for the students, the community, and their own business goals. They love these kids, take them in, support them, and give them a great opportunity to succeed.”

Added Turner, operations manager in Adairsville, “GPP is a program that is focused, targeted, and is a good fit with who Beaulieu is and what we can offer, but I realize every company has different needs. It’s bigger than us and this program, but the outcome has exponential potential. I tell people I know in other manufacturing companies that it’s time to make a difference and find a program that works for your company.”

He said, “These manufacturing jobs affect the local community, the region, and the state. By getting high school students who are at risk of not graduating into these programs, we are not only impacting the trajectory of these kids’ futures, but also filling the job pipeline and changing the future of the manufacturing workforce in Georgia.”

## About Beaulieu

Founded in 1978, Beaulieu America a privately-held company, based out of Dalton, GA, and is the third largest flooring manufacturer and the largest carpet-only maker in the world. With 13 manufacturing plants in Georgia, 2 distribution centers in the state, and two plants in Alabama, Beaulieu employs 4,500 people to manufacture and sell carpet, carpet tiles, luxury vinyl, engineering hardwoods, and laminates.

As a producer of both residential and commercial carpets, Beaulieu is at the forefront of innovation. They develop eco-friendly products, made with post-consumer recycled content, and have developed solutions for built-in attributes to their products, such as odor controlling treatment and antimicrobial technology. Additionally, the company has won awards from architecture and interior design organizations for their commercial brands.

## About Great Promise Partnership

Great Promise Partnership is a state-wide non-profit organization committed to increasing educational attainment and workforce development across Georgia. GPP connects high schools to local employers, helping create employment opportunities for youth who are at risk of dropping out of high school. Businesses offer entry level positions to students, as well as mentoring and life skills. Students must go to school to go to work, and pay increases are based on school as well as work performance. This program offers a pathway for young people facing real challenges to successfully navigate school and work, creating a better future for themselves, and a workforce pipeline for Georgia's employers. For more information about the program, contact Merrill Wilcox at [merrill@gpppartnership.org](mailto:merrill@gpppartnership.org).