Matt Norris
2014 CAWS Narrative

I enjoyed a week of becoming a part of the Royal Technologies family the week of June 23- 27. I intentionally use the word family due to the environment that was tangible from my initial moments entering the doors of the immaculate facility hidden near the intersection of Highway 157 and 278. I pass the building every day on the way to school, and was unaware of its presence until my CAWS experience.

I quickly learned that one of the philosophical pillars of the company was that individuals matter. This fundamental belief permeates the culture of the environment in details large and small. From a complimentary employee ice cream freezer, the cleanliness of the entire facility, and employee incentive programs, the idea that every person is important is not words that are said- rather actions that are evident daily.

Royal Technologies is a tier 2 supplier of a vast array of molded plastic automotive parts to various companies. They are also a tier 1 supplier of office chair components, including foam seats, to Hayworth- a high end office furnishings company.

My week with Royal started with a meeting with all of the leadership team on the production floor- a daily occurrence at the beginning of first shift. This meeting is a time for the individuals in leadership capacities to communicate face-to-face about the previous day's issues or prevention of issues before they arise. Everyone is updated on the orders being processed- and each person has the opportunity to communicate with the group as a whole.

After the morning meeting, I met with Terry Puffer, supervisor of molding operations. He gave me an overview of the process of producing molded plastics as well as a timeline of the progression of the Cullman facility, as he was one of the initial members to open the operations here.

I worked the rest of Monday with Cristy Fuller, one of the top trainers on the production floor. I shadowed her as we rotated through the production of various parts including a Hayworth seat back frame, and side mirror housings that would eventually end up gracing the body of a BMW. I was introduced to the imperfections that employees are trained to detect. I was amazed to see the amount of technology employed to assist in reducing human error in the process.

On Tuesday morning, I worked with Hannah Gore- a Hanceville High graduate- in producing passenger seat side panels that would be installed in a Kia Sorento. I was shown some of the modifications that had been made to the original part to increase its structural integrity. Tuesday afternoon was spent with Lee Asherbranner, an auditor in the automotive production area. I learned that auditors play a vital role in connecting the production and shipping departments, and are constantly troubleshooting to avoid production issues. I enjoyed using a handheld scanner to inventory parts that were being produced.

I finished Tuesday with Walt Hayes, who is tasked with ensuring that the parts produced in the Cullman facility are of the quality that the customer demands. He stated an idea that had not previously entered my thought process. The items produced at Royal will end up in the interior of a vehicle alongside other parts that

are produced elsewhere. All of these parts must match in color and finish in order to produce a quality and cohesive interior. It was an eye opening conversation.

Wednesday was spent in the foam production department. I was in awe at the various items produced by a large single robotic carousel that would turn a liquid foam solution into a variety of items. We produced stool seats, memory foam pillows, and Hayworth chair backs and seats as well. Mark Long, foam department supervisor showed me the daily quality testing process for the foam parts. We discussed the factors that can affect foam quality, and he also showed me how the different chemical components react to result in a spongy foam product. My science background was particularly intrigued watching this reaction take place.

On Thursday, I spent the morning in an assembly area of the facility. In this area, workers take some of the same molded plastic seat back frames that I had seen on Monday, and assemble them further with additional components and a mesh backing in some cases. Bare frames entering this area leave as a functional seat back. There are several different styles of seats produced in this area. That afternoon, I shadowed in the shipping and receiving department. The constant flow of raw materials in, products out, and staging of materials was impressive. I was overwhelmed with the amount of information that is simultaneously processed flawlessly among the members of this department. The management of shipments in and out and communication with customers was very smooth.

I concluded my week with the "front of the house" staff. Friday morning was spent with Xavier Moss, who is responsible for customer service. Xavier gave me an overview of the variety of customers that Royal supplies products to. He acts as a liaison between the needs of the customer, and the production in Cullman. I observed him communicating with customers, as well as making rounds on the production floor to check on any issues in production that may need to be communicated with customers. As the week I spent was just prior to the 4th of July Holiday, Xavier also communicated with customers as to their operation plans- which in turn affected the plans of the Cullman facility.

I spent time in conversation with Susan Guthrie, Human Resources director, about the qualities that Royal Technologies seeks to hire in its workforce. This conversation led to many tips that I can pass on to students in regards to what employers are seeking in both intrinsic qualities and constructing a resume.

My last assignment at Royal Technologies was with Carlos Flanigan, Plant Manager of the Cullman facility. We expanded on the topic of the qualities Royal is seeking, discussed leadership philosophies, and even exchanged suggestions for books to read. I found Carlos to be very much in touch with those he leads, responsive to their needs, and even heard of him spending time on the floor rolling up his sleeves and working on the production lines.

I left from Royal impressed with the number of parts produced, the efficiency with which they are produced, the culture of the company itself, and with a greater knowledge of the skills my students would need to pursue a career in this field, including time management, problem solving skills, math processing abilities, computer proficiency, and personal qualities such as promptness, responsibility, and dependability. I'm grateful for the opportunity, and am convinced it will make me a better educator for the students that I serve on a daily basis.