

“You Call This Work?”

Industries Benefit School, Students

BY ROGER MORTON

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Sophomore Jason Nichols lines up an oxygen tent canopy to install a large port.

Work? I call it service! Was I impressed when I heard what some of the students at Sunnydale Academy, in Centralia, Missouri, are doing to help earn their tuition.

But perhaps it's because I have lived much of my life in a country setting that I was particularly responsive to big machinery, with the sights and sounds and smells of steam escaping as eight or

twelve molds had expandable polystyrene injected into them. Then the sight, seconds later, of pure white pieces of perfectly molded foam popping out appealed to my sense of symmetry and beauty. Students packed and shipped these pieces to companies that would use them to package such things as crock pots, toasters, microwave ovens, and even filing cabinets.

Diversified Plastics Corporation established a plant on the campus of

Sunnydale Academy in 1976. Employing an average of two dozen students during daily four-hour shifts, this industry contributes nearly \$44,000 to student accounts each school year. Ed Saville, its general manager, has seen its impact upon student help. “At first many students are shocked by the experience of being a part of an authentic industrial work force. But as they gain the disciplines of efficient labor, I have seen them develop high levels of competency and experience the pride of a job well done. Meaningful work helps to develop maturity.”

During the early 1980s, another industry was developed on campus, Sunnydale Industries, Incorporated (SDI). Through the years one of SDI's main product lines has been oxygen tent canopies for use in respiratory therapy. Canopies are built of clear plastic film much like a tent. Seams are made with an impulse heat sealer and intake-exhaust ports are placed in the tent using dielectric sealers. SDI markets these canopies through a dealer network in the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico.

A newer SDI product line really excited me as I saw students operating the impressive array of high-tech machines. In early 1990, a medical supplier asked

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Ed Saville, manager of the Diversified Plastics Corporation branch located at Sunnydale Academy, watches as junior students Paul Prevo and Todd McFarland inspect and pack pieces of expandable polystyrene packaging material.

SDI to design an isolation chamber for AIDS patients. This chamber was important in giving aerosolized Pentamidine therapy, not only in protecting medical personnel and other patients from the coughing that the treatment often induces, but also to filter the air coming to AIDS patients, since their immune systems are suppressed. In the time since the first prototype was developed and produced in small production runs, five additional chambers have been developed. By the beginning of this school year, full-shift production had become possible. Utilization of these chambers by the health-care industry has been phenomenal. At the recent American Association of Respiratory Care convention in Atlanta, there were seven isolation or semi-isolation units displayed that had been designed for use in Pentamidine therapy. Sunnydale students had built six of the seven! This is a real service to the world.

During this time of expansion in the respiratory-care products line, other areas have been explored. In the fall of 1990, SDI began building and inspecting computer parts for 3M Company. Sunnydale students have gained distinction for their careful work in this area. Recently when Erv Bales, SDI's general manager, was talking with 3M management, one staff member said, "I'd rather give the job to Sunnydale. They do a better job than any of our other suppli-

Sophomore Michelle Studabaker sews a mitt in one of the many operations providing work at Sunnydale Industries, Inc.

ers." And the contract was theirs!

The A. B. Chance Company in nearby Centralia, Missouri, is a world-renowned manufacturer of electrical parts. For several years SDI has sought work from them. In January of 1992, Sunnydale students began work on a recently negotiated three-year contract with this company.

Each year students who work at SDI go through a series of employee seminars that discuss efficiency in the workplace, quality control, marketing, and overall job orientation. Bales gives his workers high marks for their productivity. "Our student employees have shown themselves to be both responsible and efficient in the workplace. We think it is great that our entire manufacturing work force is made up of students. We're also pleased that during this time of expansion, the number of student employees has increased 400 percent."

Last year, SDI contributed nearly \$47,000 in wages to student accounts.

With this year's enlargement, the amount will be significantly more. Helen Young, Sunnydale Academy's treasurer, says, "Our academy would not be able to operate without the outside income derived from tuition payments,

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Susan Purkey, a sophomore at Sunnydale Academy, installs a small port on one of the canopies that will one day serve in an AIDS therapy program.

subsidies, and most critically, student earnings from industries. It is this final source which often allows us to make timely payments to our creditors."

Young also pointed out the double benefit that students receive from work

experience. "First and most obvious, they can earn enough money to significantly reduce the out-of-pocket tuition costs for their Christian education. But perhaps more important is the character impact of learning job responsibility, punctuality, the value of job teamwork, and the satisfaction that comes from knowing that they have done their job well. This gives them a definite edge as they enter the job market."

But to me, what is most impressive is the fact that Sunnydale's work programs not only serve the needs of the students and academy, but they also perform a valuable service for society as well. ✍

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Sunnydale Industries, Inc. General Manager Erv Bales, inspects an AIDS treatment canopy just completed by Karen Erickson, a senior at the academy.

THINKING ABOUT AN INDUSTRY FOR YOUR SCHOOL?

Do you think that an industry might be the solution to your school's cash flow problem? If so, there are several things you need to consider. The first item is ownership. Three basic ownership plans are common, and must be weighed carefully because of their effect on long-term outcomes.

First is *academy ownership*, where all full-time employees are on the academy payroll. Conflicts in scheduling and life-style rules are minimal. However, operating losses will drain the operating capital of the school directly and immediately.

Second is *conference ownership*, where all full-time employees have the same benefits package as other conference employees. Conflicts are still minimal, since both the academy and the industry may be governed by the same operating board. In this case, the academy is not as directly affected by fluctuating profits and losses.

Third is *individual or corporate ownership*, where the school's involvement is usually limited to providing student labor. Financial benefits include predictable and regularly scheduled transfers of funds from student earnings to the academy, and no financial obligation for the industry's operation or expansion. However, both scheduling and life-styles of employees are dictated by the industry. These may not always harmonize

with the academy's standards.

Another item to be considered is selecting what product or service will be developed. The following questions need to be answered: What buildings are available? Will extensive remodeling be required? Will the school need to erect new buildings? Will new equipment need to be developed, or could existing equipment be used by adding another working shift? Are the labor requirements suited to a transitory student labor force? How many adult employees would be needed? Would they have to be trained? What sources for initial investment and operating capital are available? Will a new plant manager, accounting and secretarial services, or sales and marketing personnel be needed?

But perhaps the most important initial question relates to the profit potential. Don't ask "Will the new industry break even?" but rather "Will there be sufficient profit margin to provide for payback of initial investment, adequate operating capital, continued growth and development, and a cushion for normal business cycles and adjustments?"

A third area for development is marketing. Survey the needs of your potential customers, both local and national. Find out who's who in the industry for the product or service you're interested in, then begin making contacts. You will need to be patient and persistent. It may take as long as three years before you can bid on

projects for certain companies.

A fourth area of concern is employee training. Generally, an adult supervisor gives initial orientation and safety instruction on the machines the students will be operating. Four to eight hours of follow-up training is given by a fellow student who has already reached a high level of proficiency on the equipment. Performance is monitored by the adult supervisor, with additional pointers given until satisfactory performance standards are reached, usually within three to six weeks. For equipment operators, we have found that a ratio of one adult supervisor to eight students is efficient. If the project involves no equipment, the ratio can be substantially increased.

A final area of consideration is the relationship between academy administration and industry management. Strong academy support is needed to ensure an adequate work force during home leaves, vacations, and events that take the students off campus. Home leaves can alternate, with freshmen and juniors staying for work one time, and sophomores and seniors staying the next. During long vacations there can be designated periods of work for each student employee. Off-campus field trips must be planned well in advance. If everyone cooperates, success will be ensured.—Erv Bales, SDI general manager.