

Rubber & Plastics News®

July 24, 2017

The Rubber Industry's International Newspaper

\$99 per year. \$4.50 per copy

The next generation

Capable hands hold rubber industry's future

By Bruce Meyer

Rubber & Plastics News Staff

Those who are worried the rubber industry doesn't have enough youth to carry the sector's torch forward can rest easy.

Based on the 28 members of the *Rubber & Plastics News* Under 40 class profiled in this issue, the future of the industry is in good hands. They represent a wide variety of areas and occupations within the sector and, as a group, express the optimism that can help carry on the tradition of sharp thinking and technological advances that keep the rubber and tire industries moving forward.

And while many view rubber as a mature industry that might not appeal to younger generations, that's not apparent here.

"Every day there is something new and different," said Casey Hedlund, 30, a senior scientist at Lord Corp. "I may spend one day researching literature for a new project, the next day mixing a compound for it, or a few days later impatiently waiting for test results. Through the entire process, I gain knowledge on materials and techniques."

Others in the class echoed that sentiment in answers they submitted to surveys following their nomination.

"When I asked the engineers who interviewed me to

Meet RPN's Under 40 Class of 2017, beginning on Page 9.



describe a day as a project engineer, they told me that their days are always different," said Dalton Hart, 26, a senior project engineer at Desma USA. "Knowing that I would always be challenged and working on new ideas intrigued me and sold me on the position. Learning that I would see projects from start to finish indi-

cated to me that I would feel a great sense of accomplishment at my job."

Alexandra Krawicz, 36, lead chemist of global research and development at SI Group, felt after her interview that the company would be a good fit for her. "I

See *Generation*, page 18

Tekni-Plex expands in Asia, U.S.



Tekni-Plex's medical molding plant in Suzhou, China.

By Chris Sweeney

Rubber & Plastics News Staff

SUZHOU, China—Tekni-Plex Inc. is expanding its global footprint and product offerings through two of its subsidiaries.

First, the firm is investing \$15 million for a new manufacturing facility in Suzhou, near Shanghai. The firm said it represents the single largest recent investment by Tekni-Plex, responding to the growing needs of the Asia-Pacific pharmaceutical and medical device markets. The site will manufacture products from three of the firm's units—Natvar, Colorite and Action Technology.

In a joint move, the facility will produce Natvar's recently announced silicone extrusion tubing capabilities for

See *Tekni-Plex*, page 21

Another round of expansions

Cooper Standard enhances global capabilities

By Chris Sweeney

Rubber & Plastics News Staff

NOVI, Mich.—Cooper Standard Automotive Inc. is drastically increasing its global technical capabilities and North American manufacturing presence with a variety of moves.

The firm plans to open a new North American innovation center in Livonia, Mich., nearly doubling the size and scope of its current center in nearby Farmington Hills. Chief Operating Officer Keith Stephenson said the facility is set to open in October.

In a separate move, Cooper Standard is investing \$1 million to expand its manufacturing capabilities for coolant tube and hose assemblies, transmission cooling lines, and fuel and brake lines at Surgoinsville, Tenn., in response to customer growth. The firm confirmed that the project will create about 98 new jobs.

Finally, the company celebrated the opening of both a test and a prototype center in Shanghai to support growth in the Asia-Pacific region. Stephenson said the project represents a \$5.8 million investment and expects employment to reach about 100 engineers in the coming months.

See *Cooper*, page 21



Cooper's new Asia-Pacific test center.



2 WEEKS AWAY -
REGISTER TODAY!

August 8-9, 2017
See page 2 for the agenda.

CRAIN

Crain Communications Inc.

Entire contents © 2017
by Crain Communications Inc.



Rubber industry full of young, promising talent

By Chris Sweeney
Rubber & Plastics News Staff

There's no denying that the rubber industry needs to attract more young, qualified people. But look closely and you'll find plenty already embracing what it has to offer.

That's what the editorial staff at *Rubber & Plastics News* discovered when we solicited—and received—nominations for the 28 qualified individuals who make up our Under 40 Class of 2017. Our goal was to find and spotlight as many young professionals as possi-

ble. Anyone who was under the age of 40 and working for a company that serves the rubber industry was eligible; there just had to be a compelling reason why.

It wasn't a tough sell. Our class consists of innovative scientists, strategic marketers, crafty salespeople and even company leaders. Most were not exposed to the rubber industry prior to being recruited, rather they saw an opportunity to work for a strong company and discovered just how innovative rubber can be.

I, for one, studied to be a sports re-

porter and now will never look at a car the same way.

Others were born into it. With the industry being so tight-knit, it's not surprising to find young professionals who grew up watching their father, or in some cases grandfather, working at a plant. Or being involved with the family business at a very young age.

But nearly everyone answered this question—"where do you see yourself in five years?"—the same: They want to advance and grow within their current company. Many see themselves as se-

nior leaders, other see themselves pushing the barriers of innovation, but all have fully embraced all the opportunities rubber has to offer.

So while there is still work to be done in filling the pipeline with promising young minds—it's hard to quantify the average age of the rubber industry work force, but it's closer to retirement than not—just as important is to make sure the ones already here remain engaged.

Say hello to the future. If this project is any indication, it certainly looks bright.

Casey Hedlund



Age: 30
Title: Senior scientist
Company: Lord Corp.

Why she was selected: Hedlund has been instrumental in using her experience to help others transition into new roles with Lord. She received a 2017 STEP Award Emerging Leaders award from Women in Manufacturing for her efforts.

What inspired you to pursue a career in the rubber industry?

I was not at all familiar with the rubber industry through college. While applying after graduation, I came across an open position in the Materials and Process Engineering Laboratory at Lord. Wanting to spend time in the lab, I accepted the position and my quest to learn the properties and processing of rubber began. As I met veterans in the industry, the same theme continued to emerge: "Rubber gets into your blood." After five years, I can understand why that and similar comments are made. There is intrigue and a mystery about rubber that draws a person into this discipline where I hope to stay for the remainder of my career.

What accomplishment are you most proud of so far and why?

The release of the first compound I developed was an incredibly proud moment for me. Following the project from inception to release in production, I rode a roller coaster of highs and lows with great advancements and setbacks in the development process. Through it all, I developed a compound that surpassed the original targets.

Where do you see yourself in five years?

I would like to attain greater depth and breadth of knowledge in rubber compounding and to make a positive impact for my company and for the industry. I want to expand STEM programs to reach more students and help inspire the next generation of chemists, engineers and mathematicians, particularly for the rubber industry.

Other interests: An avid runner and volleyball player, Hedlund and her husband recently trained for the Pittsburgh Marathon. She looks forward to the 5K every fall at the ACS Rubber Expo.

I have learned that while the world is big, our industry is very interconnected globally.

Erick Sharp

Erick Sharp



Age: 34
Title: President
Company: Ace Products and Consulting

Why he was selected: Hailed by multiple nominees for his business acumen and technical expertise in the rubber/silicone industry. Sharp launched his own company in 2015.

What inspired you to pursue a career in the rubber industry?

During my final year of college, a family friend told me a local business, Edgetech (now Quanex), was hiring engineers. When I applied, I did not know what Edgetech made or what their manufacturing process consisted of. Therefore, I must admit that initially the thing that moved me into the rubber industry was the opportunity to get an engineering job five minutes from my house and prior to graduating. Edgetech offered tuition reimbursement and worked around my class schedule for my last year of college. These factors made it an attractive opportunity for me. The endless opportunities in the rubber industry

have kept me engaged in it ever since.

How has working in the rubber industry broadened your view of the world?

My work in the rubber industry has brought me to 15 different countries. Additionally, I did a one-year work assignment in the United Kingdom. Through this experience I have learned that while the world is big, our industry is very interconnected globally. Global factors have a strong influence on markets, pricing and technical developments.

Where do you see yourself in five years?

Had someone asked me this question five years ago my answer would not have been where I am today. I am glad my journey has taken me beyond what my expectations were. Five years from now I expect to have expanded my business and business ventures. I hope to be more involved in the development of the industry infrastructure. I want to be making an even bigger difference in my community and people's lives.

Other interests: After his oldest son, Chace, was diagnosed with autism, Erick and his wife April began launching awareness campaigns. He participates in research studies, co-teaches a professional and parent collaboration course at Kent State University, and is co-director of his church's special needs ministry. Their other son, Ian, is almost two years old.

Brandon Robards



Age: 39
Title: President
Company: Ace Extrusion L.L.C.

Why he was selected: The senior executive of Ace Extrusion has helped the company expand its production footprint during the last five years.

What inspired you to pursue a career in the rubber industry?

Growing up, my father, Tim, was my hero. He had a very successful sales career in the rubber industry and used to take me to

If students are willing to work hard and are looking for a challenging and rewarding career, they ought to look strongly at a career in the rubber industry.

Brandon Robards

the office with him on Saturday mornings. I would tour the plant with him, look at all the huge machines making products, and kind of fell in love with the smell of it. I had a unique opportunity to start on the ground floor of a start-up rubber manufacturing company, Ace Extrusion, with my father and my current partners in 2005, and I jumped at the chance to learn the processes and learn the business from the plant floor, first-hand. Rubber processing is challenging, and it has been a learning experience, but understanding the business from the ground floor up has been educational and invaluable.

What accomplishment are you most proud of so far and why?

The establishment of solid relationships. The rubber industry is a tight-knit industry, and we are trusted daily by our employees, our customers and our suppliers. It has been exciting to watch these relationships develop and grow over the past 12 years. We come to work every day, as a team, to continue to grow and develop both our current as well as new relationships.

What advice do you have for students considering a career in the rubber industry?

There is a need for young, technical people in this industry. If students are willing to work hard and are looking for a challenging and rewarding career, they ought to look strongly at a career in the rubber industry. There is an age gap in this industry, and there is room to grow in this industry for young talent.

Other interests: Celebrated his 18th anniversary with his wife, Kathy, and spends time coaching, driving, teaching and hanging out with their daughter and three boys. Plays guitar for his church and helps lead youth ministries with his family.

I wanted a challenging career with the potential to learn new things and make improvements.

Zac Walters

Zac Walters



Age: 26
Title: Engineer
Company: Cooper Tire & Rubber Co.

Why he was selected: Contributed significantly in the firm's Biomaterial Research Development Initiative grant, a project to study the potential use of guayule to replace *Hevea* natural rubber in tires, and is now an integral member of Cooper's innovation team.

What inspired you to pursue a career in the rubber industry?

My family was a big influence in this decision. My grandfather worked at Cooper as a tire builder, and my father currently works at Cooper in the plant as a production worker. I grew up hearing stories about Cooper, and I always viewed Cooper as a potential workplace. Another big source of inspiration is the fact that there is still so much to learn about the behavior of rubber. I wanted a challenging career with the potential to learn new things and make improvements. There is potential for innovation, research and development in the rubber industry, which was enticing to me.

How did your company sell the rubber industry to you during the recruiting/hiring process?

As part of my recruitment, Cooper discussed the components that make up a tire, and the different roles of each tire component and the complexity involved in tire design. Previously, I had always pictured tires as black, round and made of rubber. The complexity of tire construction and the performance requirements for tires impressed me and got me excited about a career in the tire industry. I was looking for an industry that was well-established, but welcomed innovation, and the tire industry fit that bill.

What advice do you have for students considering a career in the rubber industry?

Seek to understand and apply the main concepts from your courses rather than solving math problems to earn good grades. Any scientist or engineer can solve math problems, but the great scientists and engineers understand the key scientific concepts and can apply them to practical situations. A career in the rubber industry requires a lot of on-the-job learning and there are aspects of the science that are still evolving, so be ready to be a lifetime learner. The rubber industry is ideal for people who are looking for a

dynamic career that offers a broad range of experiences. I would also say that, at least for the tire industry, you will get carbon black on your hands and clothes, and you will come home smelling like sulfur from time to time, but you will still enjoy a challenging and rewarding career.

Other interests: Welcomed a baby daughter, Felicity, in March with his wife Brooke and plays drums in his local church's band.

Phillip Seib



Age: 32
Title: Quality assurance manager
Company: Cooper Tire & Rubber Co.

Why he was selected: Described as relentless in his effort to continually improve and ensure Cooper produces the highest quality products.

What inspired you to pursue a career in the rubber industry?

I have always had a lot of interest in the automotive industry. Upon graduating with my industrial engineering degree from Southern Illinois University, I was offered a job with Cooper Tire at their Texarkana, Ark., plant. I jumped at the opportunity to get involved with the production of a part that is critical to the safety and performance of automobiles.

How did your company sell the rubber industry to you during the recruiting/hiring process?

I had very little knowledge of tires at the time, but I knew I wanted to be connected to the automobile industry. I was extremely impressed with Cooper Tire's level of technology, ever-evolving environment and the fast-paced atmosphere of the manufacturing plant.

What advice do you have for students considering a career in the rubber industry?

Like any industry, the rubber industry can be challenging at times. These challenges provide excellent opportunities to learn and grow skills, and overcoming challenges to produce a high-quality product that meets or exceeds customer expectations is very rewarding.

Other interests: Exploring the outdoors with his wife, Audrey, and nearly 1-year-old girl Ruby.

Felipe Escamilla



Age: 28
Title: Rubber technologist
Company: R.D. Abbott Co.

Why he was selected: The company credits his efforts for expanding its knowledge base of rubber's rheological behavior, specifically how it processes in molding, calendering and extrusion.

What inspired you to pursue a career in the rubber industry?

I fell into the rubber industry by coincidence. Before working for R.D. Abbott I did not realize the full expanse of the industry; I figured that it was largely concentrated in the Midwest. After meeting the people at R.D. Abbott and becoming part of the team, it was the company and industry culture that convinced me to stay.

How did your company sell the rubber industry to you during the recruiting/hiring process?

It was a relief to see veterans with more than 30 years of experience enjoying their work and looking forward to the future. There is no better selling point, in my mind, than enjoying what you do and who you work with day after day.

What advice do you have for students considering a career in the rubber industry?

If possible, start in a lab. This industry evolves in response to a knowledge of well-developed individuals coupled with the application of new technological developments. Consequently, the value that a student can generate for a company is aligned with their hands-on experience.

Other interests: Travels back and forth to Mexico to visit his family, when possible, at least once a month.

Jose Gonzalez



Age: 27
Title: Rubber technologist
Company: R.D. Abbott

Why he was selected: Applied his knowledge of adhesion chemistry to improve rubber to substrate bonding, co-authoring several papers through the ACS Rubber Division.

What inspired you to pursue a career in the rubber industry?

Innovation was my main inspiration for pursuing a career in the rubber industry. I love the idea of creating new things. Through working in R.D. Abbott's lab, it's something I get to do almost every day.

What accomplishment are you most proud of so far and why?

I am extremely proud of being a co-author on a paper published by the ACS in 2016 titled "In-Mold Bonding of Fluorosilicone Onto Thermoplastic Substrates." The research continues today and I look forward to becoming an expert on the subject someday.

How did your company sell the rubber industry to you during the recruiting/hiring process?

R.D. Abbott gave me the opportunity to work in the field as I was going to school. They worked around my school schedule and have been very helpful through the entire process of finishing my degree in chemistry.

Other interests: Stays active by hiking and running, currently training for a 50-mile race in December.

Jose Elias



Age: 32
Title: Rubber technologist
Company: R.D. Abbott

Why he was selected: Has helped the firm develop clean grades of rubber compounds for pharmaceutical and medical device applications, furthering the use of rubber into health care markets.

What inspired you to pursue a career in the rubber industry?

Though I did not initially plan on entering the rubber industry, with the encouragement of my friends, I decided to give it a try.

How did your company sell the rubber industry to you during the recruiting/hiring process?

It was made clear to me that while the rubber industry is well-established, there are still ample opportunities for developments and growth for those willing to put in the time and energy necessary to push the boundaries. Curiosity was encouraged.

What advice do you have for students considering a career in the rubber industry?

Complement your course work in chemistry and materials science with an internship in a lab. There is no substitute for hands-on experience with the technologies and tools of the trade. Learn theory in lecture and then put it into practice in the lab.

Other interests: Loves cinema, running long distances and tries to live by the core values he gained in the U.S. Marine Corp.



Rubber & Plastics News

UNDER 40

Erin Edminister



Age: 26

Title: Marketing manager

Company: BKT Tires

Why she was selected: Has enhanced BKT's marketing efforts in the U.S., both by building on established programs and looking for new opportunities.

What do you love most about your job?

I love being a part of so many different projects at once. My position is all encompassing, meaning I get to do far more than just advertising. The job requirements are constantly changing to keep up with the ever-revolving demands of the marketplace. There is no way to predict what will happen within manufacturing, the marketplace or environment. One day several new construction sites may be approved and on another weather may cause a downward trend in the agricultural market. We are always on our toes and the fast pace creates that much more excitement in what I do.

What accomplishment are you most proud of so far and why?

Aiding in the shift of BKT USA's marketing efforts. When I started with BKT I focused heavily on switching our advertising from trade to a focus on end-users. The goal was to increase our brand awareness across each of our product segments as many end-users didn't realize the breadth and depth of our lines. There has been extensive asset development to make and further the change from a push to pull marketing strategy. This shift has included traditional advertising, social, events, sponsorships and our trade shows. Organization and execution of trade shows from farm shows to events such as SEMA, MINExpo and CONEXPO was quite an undertaking. The first successful show held at the Las Vegas Convention Center was a great milestone for my path with this company.

How did your company sell the rubber industry to you during the recruiting/hiring process?

The promise of always being busy, travel opportunities and challenges to help take the company and brand to a new level in the U.S. I have always been someone who needs to be busy and have ongoing projects. There is a lot of work that needs to be done and there are continuous challenges that we face in the industry, from a brand standpoint to matters outside of our control, such as the environment, government, etc. I knew I would have plenty to learn and could bring quite a bit to our team with my background, so it was an easy sell.

Other interests: Born and raised in Akron, enjoys taking advantage of the summer weather and spending time with her family and German Shepherd.

Loudan Hammersmith



Age: 30

Title: Regional sales manager

Company: BKT Tires

Why he was selected: Has developed into a new sales role by quickly learning new segments.

What do you love most about your job?

Every day there is something new to experience within the off-highway segment. One day I may be visiting a farmer at his dairy operation and the next I am out with an OTR customer tracking performance at an underground mine.

How has working in the rubber industry broadened your view of the world?

Having been with BKT for three years now, I have made multiple trips to our manufacturing facilities in India. Being given the opportunity to see a part of the world that most never do has been an incredible experience. In terms of the overall outlook of the rubber industry, it has been awesome to see all of the ways tires are shaping the way people do their jobs. With all of the new research and technology being put into tires, we are able to improve crop yields for farmers and improve performance and safety in mines.

How did your company sell the rubber industry to you during the recruiting/hiring process?

This was ironically done by my mother. After my initial interview, I was not sure that I wanted to take a job in the industry. After having a conversation with her about my reservations, she told me to look outside at all the tires on the road. The conversation ended there and I took the job.

Other interests: A huge Cleveland sports fan and owns a Doberman Pinscher named Willow.

Rachel Greenhill



Age: 25

Title: Junior research scientist

Company: TARRC

Why she was selected: Her efforts helped TARRC develop a practical solution to address mislabeled planting materials

that's ready for implementation.

What inspired you to pursue a career in the rubber industry?

I've always wanted to work in crop improvement, with such a growing global population, increased sustainable yields on minimal land are an absolute must. The rubber industry specifically has seen growth in scope and application in recent years, in part due to the new developments in biotechnology.

How has working in the rubber industry broadened your view of the world?

TARRC is a diverse and multicultural company, in the biotechnology department alone we have Italian, Russian and Brazilian scientists, to name a few. Working with such a range of nationalities really brings a multitude of new ideas and knowledge to the table. From working at TARRC, I have had the opportunity to visit Malaysia several times primarily working in the field collecting samples. As a genomics scientist it is really important to step back and see the bigger picture sometimes, to realize how extensive the rubber industry is—from the smallholding farmers to the tire retailers and consumers.

What advice do you have for students considering a career in the rubber**industry?**

The rubber industry holds many opportunities in a variety of scientific and business-related disciplines. My personal advice would be to apply for summer internships or work experience placements to get as much experience as possible before leaving university. In my case, the experience gained from my two summer placements at TARRC resulted in a full-time job.

Other interests: Enjoys running and volunteering for AgeUK, a charity that provides companionship, advice and support to elderly people in England.

The rubber industry holds many opportunities in a variety of scientific and business-related disciplines.

Rachel Greenhill



My passion for the rubber industry developed during my time as an intern/co-op at Bridgestone Americas Technical Center.

Josh Guiliams

Alexandra Krawicz



Age: 36

Title: Lead chemist of global research and development

Company: SI Group

Why she was selected: After two years of research, Krawicz is preparing to submit her first patent in the U.S. for a new resin technology she developed for the rubber industry.

How has working in the rubber industry broadened your view of the world?

I must say that before joining SI Group I did not appreciate the breadth of applications for rubber and resin chemistry, and was not familiar with many of its applications. I also learned a tremendous amount about scale-up production, and I am still learning that part of the job. Those were things I had not been exposed to in college and graduate school. Another aspect of the job is that it is not enough to be a good chemist; you need to understand the business side to drive important projects forward that will make the organization successful. I am still learning this as well as perfecting interactions with customers to understand their needs.

What advice do you have for students considering a career in the rubber industry?

If you are an undergraduate student I strongly suggest you find an internship in a company and get firsthand experience to see if you like it. There also are opportunities to do undergraduate research with professors who are leaders in this field, and I recommend seeking those out. I had done undergraduate research myself and I think it gave me an edge over other job candidates when I found my first industrial job right after college and before going to graduate school.

Where do you see yourself in five years?

I enjoy the technical aspects of my work, and I am eager to expand into strategic decision making and road mapping. I would like to have more direct customer interaction on a regular basis and develop a deeper understanding of the market requirements and trends. I am looking forward to eventually moving into a leadership position, but with a strong technical background to drive the group and company toward new accomplishments.

Other interests: Enjoys exploring new countries/places, hiking and trying new cuisines with her husband.

Josh Guiliams



Age: 37

Title: Technical director

Company: Polymer Valley Chemicals

Why he was selected: Since joining Polymer Valley Chemicals, Guiliams has been responsible for developing new products with two pending patents.

What inspired you to pursue a career in the rubber industry?

My passion for the rubber industry developed during my time as an intern/co-op at Bridgestone Americas Technical Center. Working in the analytical labs, I found great mentors in Dr. Julia Zimmerman, Lisa Dinger and Tim O'Connor. Under their direction, I had the opportunity to learn about teamwork, chemical analytical methods, process engineering, compound development and rubber technology outside of the classroom, while I was pursuing a degree in chemistry/engineering and polymer science. The hands-on experience I gained during this time challenged me and I began to excel. Prior to graduation, I was offered a full-time position with Bridgestone and worked there for 13 years in multiple facets of product development.

What accomplishment are you most proud of so far and why?

During my time at Lanxess' Butyl Division, I led a global team to revisit an industry concept for halobutyl in tire tread applications. Historically the performance issue with halobutyl in tire tread applications dealt with tire wear performance issues. Our team was able to solve the wear performance issue and as a result, we initiated a global market strategy for this technology. Since doing so, the technology has received multiple commercial successes.

What advice do you have for students considering a career in the rubber industry?

Mentorship is key. Surround yourself with people who have had success and challenges within in the industry. A great mentor will provide guidance and support, as well as challenge you. It's also important to be self-directed in your own success. Read trade publications and join trade associations, for example. Challenge yourself to study new technologies and be a life-long student of science.

Other interests: Exercising, improving his golf swing, and wine tasting with Debbie, his wife of nine years.

Bart Hubenak



Age: 31

Title: Marketing specialist

Company: Ryco North America

Why he was selected: Hubenak recently joined Ryco as its marketing specialist and has shown promise with the firm.

What inspired you to pursue a career in the rubber industry?

I have always been fascinated with the global markets. Working at Ryco I have the privilege of watching trends across many sectors of the economy. Ryco allows me to follow trends in the marketplace while educating my colleagues how to capitalize on these trends and improve their daily responsibilities.

How has working in the rubber industry broadened your view of the world?

Working in the rubber industry has broadened my view of the world by ensuring me there is plenty of room for growth and innovation. Regardless of the decisions made by economic policy makers, the rubber industry has shown me human innovation will always leave room for optimism.

What advice do you have for students considering a career in the rubber industry?

For any student entering the industry, their main objective should be studying as many digital tools as they can in conjunction with studying the global economy. Digitalization is here to stay and is a tool future generations must understand. Also, I am under the firm belief future generations must understand how and why economic policies affect the marketplace.

Other interests: Enjoys fishing, sailing, mountain biking and the outdoors with family and friends.

Cody Hughes



Age: 26

Title: Government sales

Company: Hanna Rubber

Why he was selected: During his four-year career with Hanna, Hughes seeks

opportunities to provide customers with great service.

What inspired you to pursue a career in the rubber industry?

I like helping people and solving problems. The rubber industry allows me to do that.

What do you love most about your job?

I get to deal with a lot of different products across many industry segments and meet lots of interesting people.

What advice do you have for students considering a career in the rubber industry?

Do it. Every day is something new and exciting. You will face different challenges each day.

Other interests: Plays semi-pro football and works on the family cattle farm.

I like helping people and solving problems.

Cody Hughes

Asher Dean



Age: 26

Title: Production floor lead

Company: Hanna Rubber

Why he was selected: Through four years with the company, Dean understands the need to have quality people working with him and will put in the extra effort to make sure a customer's order goes out correct and on time.

What inspired you to pursue a career in the rubber industry?

Coming out of college, looking for a job, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. My cousin worked in the industry and helped me get into a position at his company.

What do you love most about your job?

I love having different tasks every day and not having to do the same repetitive thing over and over. I really enjoy working with my hands and this job allows me to do so.

What accomplishment are you most proud of so far and why?

Having the knowledge and ability to work anywhere in my company's production warehouse is a big goal of mine. There are nine different shops in my company's warehouse, and my goal is to train and master in each one of them. I am proud to say that I have completed seven of the nine shops.

Other interests: Is set to marry his fiancée Miranda in December and spends time with his older brother, sister and 7-year-old niece.

Adam Barfoot



Age: 36

Title: Plant manager

Company: Bridgestone Americas' Aiken, S.C., off-the-road tire plant

Why he was selected: One of the five original employees appointed to the firm's OTR tire manufacturing plant is now leading the South Carolina operation.

What inspired you to pursue a career in the rubber industry?

Tire manufacturing is an incredible process from the standpoint of the size and technology of the products and the fascinating equipment used to produce it. From passenger tire precision handling and speed to airline tire reliability and off-road tire strength and durability, there are some very innovative developments that mankind has figured out how to make, and I get to be a part of its use (equipment) and creation (tires). Also, tire and rubber products are a staple commodity that will always be needed in some sort of fashion; therefore, the industry demand is sustainable for innovative companies like Bridgestone that are in tune with customer needs.

How has working in the rubber industry broadened your view of the world?

Through my history on the truck and bus side, and now especially in the off-road tire market, I can see how so many global industries are tied together. Whether it is change in oil prices, relaxing of mining regulations, tightening vehicle standards or strengthening of foreign or domestic economies, nearly every major industry is affected in one way or another and must respond to stay successful. Those companies like Bridgestone which can predict the changes in environment and are flexible enough to adjust quickly are going to come out ahead.

What advice do you have for students considering a career in the rubber industry?

Always be available to support others who

may be struggling with specific opportunities. Your willingness to assist—and often learn as well—not only furthers the business, but also grows and rounds out your knowledge base. Don't worry if the challenge is outside of your specific department or career discipline. Also, while we are all searching and striving for success, it's important to know what "success" means to you. If I can provide a unique activity or skill set that others can't to accomplish a difficult task (independently or group/organizationally) which ultimately benefits others and the "greater good" is my definition of success.

Other interests: Spends most of his time with his wife and three young kids hiking, playing sports and traveling.

Michelle Lane



Age: 38

Title: Director of truck and bus radial tire marketing

Company: Bridgestone Americas Inc.

Why she was selected: Now oversees marketing for one of the largest businesses in the Bridgestone commercial portfolio: truck and bus radials.

What do you love most about your job?

I find the complexity and constant evolution of the tire industry particularly interesting. Most specifically, I am intrigued by the explosion of information that customers have available. Customers today are demanding more and better data that they can use to make informed decisions, and it is changing the framework of the industry. Being part of this industry shift is extremely rewarding. We have the opportunity to innovate not only around what information and data is delivered, but also on the way customers get their information. My role allows me to shape the way our organization connects with customers, as well as allows me to focus on continually delivering meeting the evolving needs of our customer base. That's an exciting place to be.

What accomplishment are you most proud of so far and why?

My team was instrumental in the launch of the Firestone VersaBuilt product line to the off-the-road tire market. I am extremely proud of this because we saw an opportunity in the market where customers needed a product that would perform in a variety of applications for a value they could afford. We worked closely as an integrated team from manufacturing to development and sales and marketing to deliver a product to market in unprecedented speed for the OTR category.

Where do you see yourself in five years?

I love working for Bridgestone and I see myself continuing to work for this great organization. The great thing about my experience here is that I have been able to continually develop and move on to bigger and more challenging roles at each step of my career. I look forward to that continued journey.

Other interests: Enjoys exercise, trying new restaurants, golf and travel.

Natalie Weingart



Age: 33

Title: Section manager of raw materials
Company: Bridgestone Americas Inc.

Why she was selected: A patented and published scientist multiple times throughout her career and grad school.

What inspired you to pursue a career in the rubber industry?

When I was growing up, my father's dad worked for Firestone in the cure room. Always looking up to my father, I was excited to be given the opportunity to be a part of something so big throughout the world.

How has working in the rubber industry broadened your view of the world?

When I travel for work or on vacation, it is amazing to me how far our products reach. People know rubber products, but often times do not understand the complexity of the product. I have the great opportunity to travel internationally to work with scientists,

engineers and business people around the world that each provide a unique approach specific to their culture that helps me understand the science behind rubber a little better each time.

What advice do you have for students considering a career in the rubber industry?

Never shy away from coursework outside your focus of study. You never know when that information or lessons learned will come in handy within your career. This helps you think outside of the box and gives you a different perspective that might give you a competitive advantage to help solve a problem. Never be afraid to try something new or ask a question. Always remember it is better to listen and watch as you never know when you might learn something.

Other interests: Citing her husband and family as an inspiration, Weingart has four children, three girls and one boy, and is one of five with three sisters and a brother. Together, they enjoy good food, vacation and fun.

Ben Galizio



Age: 36

Title: Section manager of consumer tread compound development
Company: Bridgestone Americas Inc.

Why he was selected: Has 10 published patent applications and was honored with four Bridgestone President's Awards for his work to improve tire performance.

What inspired you to pursue a career in the rubber industry?

It's in my DNA. My father, grandfather and great uncle spent most or all of their careers in the rubber industry. As I looked for opportunities in the Northeast Ohio area, I realized that the great legacy of the tire manufacturers here still offered challenges and possibilities for a great career.

What accomplishment are you most proud of so far and why?

I really enjoy helping others along their career path and with technical education. I'm also very proud of the research I conducted involving the usage of sustainable raw materials, some of which is public through patent applications.

How has working in the rubber industry broadened your view of the world?

I've had the great fortune to travel to some very interesting places throughout my career. I've experienced Japanese culture at a different level than I otherwise would have. There are some differences between cultures and working styles, but if we treat each other with kindness and respect, we can communicate effectively.

Other interests: Enjoys building guitars with his dad and playing them with his brother.



TECHNOLOGY IN MOTION

DETROIT SEPTEMBER 6-8, 2017 // COBO CENTER, DETROIT // TIMDETROIT.COM

EXPERIENCE THE BIGGEST MOBILITY TRADE SHOW IN NORTH AMERICA

AUTONOMOUS & ELECTRIC VEHICLES // CONNECTED CARS SHARED ECONOMY // DIGITAL USER EXPERIENCES

PRESENTED BY:

CRAIN

MSX INTERNATIONAL

EXHIBITORS & SPONSORS:

Deloitte

AlixPartners

Continental

Nissan

VW

ZF

GM

Toyota

Quicken Loans

planetm

LEAR CORPORATION

IAC

AVL

DASSAULT SYSTEMES

CISCO

For sponsorship & exhibitor opportunities, contact Brent Weaver at (330)865-6119 or bweaver@crain.com.



Rachel Withers



Age: 35
Title: Communications leader
Company: Bridgestone Americas Inc.

Why she was selected: Oversees all communications activities for Bridgestone Americas Tire Operations after just four years with the company, earning numerous national and regional awards for her work.

What inspired you to pursue a career in the rubber industry?

I never set out to pursue a career in the rubber industry, but I am so thankful that this is where my professional journey has led me. I was born and raised in Nashville, Tenn., and growing up here there always was a certain prestige associated with working for Bridgestone. The company, with its two great brands, has long been known as a leader both in its industry and as an employer in the Nashville area. After I graduated college, I moved around quite a bit to pursue a career in communications. At a certain point, my husband and I decided that we would be open to returning to Nashville if the right opportunity presented itself. I only applied for one job in Nashville—and that was a position in communications at Bridgestone. Thankfully, I interviewed and got the job, and joining the company has been without question one of the best decisions I ever made. There is so much opportunity at Bridgestone, and I truly love my job. This is a great industry to work in, with the smartest, most interesting and nicest people. Each day, I come to work excited by the challenges and inspired by the opportunities this industry offers.

What do you love most about your job?

There is always something new to learn, and I love that no two days are ever the same. I always feel challenged in my role and there is so much opportunity to grow. But more than that, I love the people. I truly am privileged to work with some of the smartest and most talented people in the industry, and my job gives me the opportunity to shine a light on the incredible work and innovation that they are developing to meet the needs of our customers. So many consumers don't understand what goes into making a tire—from the design, to the innovative technology, to the testing, to the manufacturing and more. Tires really are sophisticated pieces of safety technology. I love that I get to be part of the process of educating consumers about the importance of tires and help celebrate the dedicated people who are so committed to making the best tires in the world.

How did your company sell the rubber industry to you during the recruiting/hiring process?

It was a pretty easy sell. As the largest tire and rubber company in the world, Bridgestone has two great brands. It was exciting to think about being able to work for the company and help manage the reputation of those brands. In terms of the hiring process, I

think it boils down to opportunity. There is so much opportunity to grow and learn across the tire industry and particularly at Bridgestone. I am fascinated by how things work and are made, and as such I was attracted to the idea of working with engineers and scientists to help translate their very technical skills into something clear and easy to understand that resonates with consumers. We also have some fantastic marketing and sports marketing programs at Bridgestone.

Other interests: Explores new restaurants in Nashville with her husband, Keith, and practices yoga.

Nathan Pike



Age: 36
Title: Vice president/general manager
Company: GCP Industrial Products Ontario

Why he was selected: Praised for his technical knowledge and relationship building in both domestic and foreign manufacturing and sourcing.

How has working in the rubber industry broadened your view of the world?

The rubber supply chain is inherently global, and continues to become more so with new competition and markets surfacing on a regular basis. GCP's business is no exception. With manufacturing partners in more than eight countries, our products find their way into countless industries. As such, it's critical that we continuously strive to stay on top of both the short-term wants of our customers and the long-term trends that are shaping the future of our industry.

How did your company sell the rubber industry to you during the recruiting/hiring process?

Owner and CEO Gary Mottershead sold me on the growth potential the industry offered. Although the industry overall is not growing at a rapid pace, the pace of change is quick. Consolidation across our industry, new technologies, increased global competition/market opportunities and a wide array of challenging applications all contribute to a dynamic business environment that provides new avenues for growth. This struck me as an industry that I could learn from and grow with.

What advice do you have for students considering a career in the rubber industry?

The rubber industry is more interesting and dynamic than it might seem and the change is starting to accelerate. New, disruptive technologies like advanced materials, additive manufacturing, robotics and artificial intelligence are beginning to change many aspects of the rubber industry and the industries we serve. We need new minds to keep up and young people entering the industry from a wide array of disciplines can bring new ideas and talent to complement

the strengths of the more experienced leaders in our industry.

Other interests: Traveling with his wife and spending time with his mountain dog, three nephews and niece.

Russ Vogelsong



Age: 37
Title: Senior scientist
Company: Lion Elastomers

Why he was selected: Leads the development of new products for wire and cable applications, and chairs the Membership Committee of the ACS Rubber Division.

What inspired you to pursue a career in the rubber industry?

I was working on the plastics side of wire & cable, when I was asked to attend the Rubber Expo in 2005. After attending the technical sessions and listening to industry experts, I was inspired to shift direction toward the rubber industry. My interest deepened as I visited booths and learned more about the wide range of materials and applications which rubber goes in to.

How did your company sell the rubber industry to you during the recruiting/hiring process?

None of the companies I've worked for have actually had to sell me on the industry. I was born and raised near Akron, had relatives who worked in Akron for Goodyear and Firestone, and I received my engineering degree from the University of Akron. The influence of "The Rubber Capital of the World" has been present most of my life in one way or another.

What advice do you have for students considering a career in the rubber industry?

Rubber is an essential industry that is not going away. We need a pipeline full of young scientists and engineers who will take the industry through its next 50 years. Don't be afraid to participate in the many active regional rubber groups that provide opportunities for networking and professional development. I would encourage students to get involved in one of these organizations, as they are great forums to learn about the industry. Many of these organizations also offer scholarships to support academic endeavors as well.

Other interests: Collects autographed sports memorabilia.

Michael Nelson



Age: 30
Title: Applications engineer
Company: IDEX Corp.

Why he was selected: Has led internal projects to supply seals for several large oilfield service companies as the only U.S.-based application engineer for IDEX Corp.'s Precision Polymer Engineering Ltd. subsidiary.

What inspired you to pursue a career in the rubber industry?

PPE is an international company with a clear purpose and drive behind them. The more I learned about elastomers the more I realized that it is a fresh field and there are still a lot of discoveries to be made. That is exciting because every application is different and I am constantly learning.

How has working in the rubber industry broadened your view of the world?

I didn't know much about seals or elastomers in general before I started working in the industry, but now I know how prevalent they are in our everyday life. Seals can be thought of as simple components, but the failure of only one can keep a whole oil rig from operating or shut down a fab making microprocessor chips. In addition, I've learned about polymer production from base chemicals to compounding, mixing, and molding. More than most materials, polymer parts have to be designed with a manufacturing process in mind.

How did your company sell the rubber industry to you during the recruiting/hiring process?

I started asking questions about different compounds and found out that seals would be designed differently depending on the compound used. This was interesting to me, so then my manager started telling me about the different mechanical test methods for rubber and how it behaves non-linearly and is non-Newtonian. Basically they sold me with cool aspects of engineering elastomers. But then my manager also told me I'd need to interact with customers more and deliver training courses, which I wanted to try out to branch out from pure engineering like I'd done before.

Other interests: Seeking out antiques for restoration with his wife, Jessica, and 2-year-old son George. Also enjoys woodworking projects like building furniture and other small items.

We need a pipeline full of young scientists and engineers who will take the industry through its next 50 years.

Russ Vogelsong

The main inspiration I had to pursue a career in the tire industry was the opportunity to work on products which are critical to a vehicle's safety and performance.

Drew Dayton

Drew Dayton



Age: 31
Title: Product manager
Company: Toyo Tires

Why he was selected: Has utilized his development experience to help expand new categories throughout the company's consumer product line.

What inspired you to pursue a career in the rubber industry?

The main inspiration I had to pursue a career in the tire industry was the opportunity to work on products which are critical to a vehicle's safety and performance. I also wanted to challenge myself by developing products in a different industry to grow my product development background. I started out as a product engineering intern at a business seating company, moved into a product design engineering role for a wheel company, and then moved to Toyo Tires, first as a product engineer, and now as a product manager.

How has working in the rubber industry broadened your view of the world?

Toyo Tires has subsidiaries and factories all over the world. I've had the opportunity to work with and visit our engineers, researchers, factories and proving grounds in Japan on multiple occasions. Learning about Japanese culture and working for a Japanese company has exposed me to people, places and experiences I never imagined I'd have. I've also been able to work with members of Toyo Tires from Russia, Australia and Canada, showing them our culture and learning about theirs.

How did your company sell the rubber industry to you during the recruiting/hiring process?

I was already sold on the idea of working with rubber because of my appreciation for its role in the performance of vehicles. I always thought of myself as an informed consumer when purchasing tires because it was important to me to have the best vehicle performance. I was very interested in the opportunity to work in the motorsports industry, which initially drew me to the tire industry. I was immediately exposed to the challenges of tire development and have been able to work on products whose performance targets are drastically varied from purpose-built

racing tires, to light truck rugged terrain tires, to passenger car variable condition, and ultra-high performance tires.

Other interests: Enjoys skiing, cycling and is a self-described "passionate gear head" who loves to work on his car and take it to the local race track whenever possible.

Jud Robinson



Age: 36
Title: Raw materials buyer
Company: Yokohama Tire

Why he was selected: Joined Yokohama Tire Manufacturing Mississippi three years ago in its infancy as the only purchasing employee who excelled in a variety of responsibilities.

What inspired you to pursue a career in the rubber industry?

After graduating college in 2003, I spent 11 years in different areas of the steel industry. When the opportunity came up to go to work for a new manufacturing plant in the town I grew up in, it was too good to pass up. The rubber industry was new, but purchasing materials in the steel market translated well to help expedite the learning process.

What do you love most about your job?

I loved being here from the beginning. From the plant being a dirt mound in the middle of a cow pasture to quickly becoming a state-of-the-art manufacturing facility, the process has been overwhelming but at the same time the most rewarding adventure in which I have been involved.

What advice do you have for students considering a career in the rubber industry?

Go the chemical route. The more you know about rubber, the chemicals, and the mixing/manufacturing process, the quicker and farther you can go in your career. And most importantly remember to treat people as you want to be treated.

Other interests: Has a daughter, Marli, with his wife, Ashley, and is a youth minister at his local church.

Zack Beier



Age: 34
Title: Director of purchasing
Company: Q Holding Co.

Why he was selected: Beier has helped Q maintain a steady supply of raw materials to sustain strong growth for the last seven years, navigating challenges like strikes, bankruptcies and *force majeure* situations.

What do you love most about your job?

Being in purchasing, I work with suppliers of all shapes and sizes; from multi-billion dollar global corporations, to mom and pop shops down the street. That affords me the opportunity to visit these facilities, witness their processes in action and see how things are made. I get to see men and women working hard every day to improve their products and therefore their company on a global stage. To me, that's exciting because few people get the opportunity to get that perspective.

How has working in the rubber industry broadened your view of the world?

Whether it be the science behind creating the next generation material, to continuously fine-tuning the molding processes, to the automation and inspection equipment we produce on site, it's amazing to see the work and dedication my team members put into a relatively small, unseen product that's used in critical applications ranging from medical devices to cars to jets. That effort is something I don't take for granted now and it's given me an appreciation for the things I use in my everyday life that I don't think I could have learned outside of this industry.

What advice do you have for students considering a career in the rubber industry?

I believe the prospects for the rubber industry are very positive. It can provide the challenges and technical opportunities that come from working in many different industries—like health care, industrial, automotive, consumer, aerospace, etc. to develop real world skills. And I know that it's a tight-knit industry, with great people to work with, so there's definitely a sense of camaraderie.

Other interests: His 6-month-old husky keeps both him and his wife, Michelle, very busy.

I believe the prospects for the rubber industry are very positive.

Zack Beier

I never realized what an essential role rubber had within the manufacturing industry until I had a career in rubber injection molding.

Dalton Hart

Dalton Hart



Age: 26
Title: Senior project engineer
Company: Desma USA

Why he was selected: Hart has been rising quickly within Desma and has been described as an integral part of the company.

What do you love most about your job?

I love the complexity and unpredictability of my job. Every day and every project is a bit different. I see the entire process from the starting phases of the concept to the physical install and production of parts. My co-workers are also part of why I enjoy being at Desma. They make work more than just a job. Having a good team to work with on a day-to-day basis makes all the difference.

How has working in the rubber industry broadened your view of the world?

I never realized what an essential role rubber had within the manufacturing industry until I had a career in rubber injection molding. It has a part in every industry from consumer products to medical devices. My career has allowed me to work with customers across the globe.

What advice do you have for students considering a career in the rubber industry?

I graduated with a degree in mechanical engineering and I never had much opportunity within classes to learn much about the rubber industry. My advice would be if your university provides any specialized courses that allows you to study polymers, I would take it. There are a lot of interesting things that can be learned about the different molding techniques and processing of rubber.

Other interests: Enjoys cooking and entertaining for others, spending most of his time with family and friends.

Generation

Continued from page 1

met with many passionate chemists during my interview, and the level of their knowledge, enthusiasm for their work and professionalism was what tipped the scale," she said.

Shrinking world

Others said the opportunities to broaden their view of the world is another selling point for the rubber industry.

Drew Dayton, 31, a product manager at Toyo Tires, said he'd had the opportunity to work closely with engineers, researchers, factories and others in Japan on multiple occasions. "Learning about Japanese culture and working for a Japanese company has exposed me to people, places and experiences I never imagined I'd have," he said. "I've also been able to work with members of Toyo Tires from Russia, Australia and Canada, showing them our culture and learning about theirs."

Hedlund said while suppliers and manufacturers are spread across the globe, the industry still has a family feel to it. "Trade shows and conferences are an opportunity to learn and fulfill business needs, but are also to converse with friends and colleagues and learn a little more about other places and cultures," she said.

That also means a heightened opportunity to work with others to move new technology forward.

Zack Brier, 34, director of purchasing at Q Holding Co., was told when he was recruited that the firm engages the rubber supply base as partners in its R&D work. "That collaborative approach, rather than viewing suppliers as commodity or non-value-added, was what I was looking for in my next position."

Zac Walters, 26, an engineer with Cooper Tire & Rubber Co., said his first job out of college has given him the opportunity to make an impact right out of the gate. He has worked as part of a team representing a consortium led by Cooper to work on guayule rubber research through the Biomass Research and Development Initiative grant awarded by the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Energy.

As part of the project, he spoke at the ACS Rubber Division meeting in Pittsburgh in 2016 and the Tire Technology Expo in Germany earlier this year. He also submitted his first three patent applications on technology developed as part of the program.

"This project is one that many would consider a career capstone, but it was my first project coming out of college," Walters said. "It was extremely challenging and required me to learn on the go, but it also allowed



me to gain a great deal of knowledge in a short amount of time."

Generational gap

Erick Sharp, 34, president of Ace Products and Consulting, is one of two in the class to be owners or partners in a company.

"The rubber industry has been a tremendous blessing to me and I know it will be to others as well," he said. "I am passionate to see a strong group rise up in the coming generation. We must respect the work that has gone into making the industry what it is, all while striving to innovate the next chapter of it."

He is glad to see a focus put on attracting youth to the rubber industry, and wants to see associations work toward this issue. To solve what he sees as a large generational gap in the industry will require a culture shift. "We must modernize the way we think, do and act," Sharp said. "There needs to be better embracing and mentoring between veteran and younger professionals."

NAHAD: The Association for Hose and Accessories Distribution is trying to do just that with its Emerging Leaders initiative, according to Molly Mullins, the group's associate executive director.

Emerging Leaders is a re-branding of NAHAD's former Young Professionals group, and the first activity under the new moniker was a luncheon at NAHAD's recent annual meeting where veteran members representing both manufacturers and distributors shared some of their experiences in the hose industry, both in

"I am passionate to see a strong group rise up in the coming generation. We must respect the work that has gone into making the industry what it is, all while striving to innovate the next chapter of it."

Erick Sharp

good times and bad.

Mullins said the No. 1 issue she hears from NAHAD members is work force development, and one goal of the Emerging Leaders forum is to determine what the younger staff members need. "We're trying to get as much information from them to help us recruit them better as we're trying to offer them services," she said.

NAHAD even took the approach of adding a new board of directors seat—for one year instead of the normal three years—to be filled by an Emerging Leaders representative.

Lindsey Gallik, a regional sales manager with Holmbury Inc., is the first to hold the board seat as she is helping Mullins guide the Emerging Leaders program. She said the launch program was designed to help bridge this experience gap between veterans who may retire in coming years to those just ramping up their careers.



Lindsey Gallik at NAHAD's annual convention.

"We had board members at every table, and they facilitated the conversation," Gallik said. "It's not very often you can sit down with either these CEOs, or sales managers for these corporations, and have an hour-long conversation about what they did wrong in the industry, as well as what they did right."

Gallik came into the industry in 2010 at her family's firm, Crawford Machine, which manufactures brass fittings. She stayed on after Holmbury purchased the company in 2013. She said she loves the industry, especially the networking, relationships and atmosphere. She also likes how the experienced vets took their time to help install knowledge into the younger members of the industry.

"They made the statement they need the younger work force, and they take value in that," she said.

Gallik wants to see Emerging Leaders be a program where there is communication throughout the year—such as regional meetings or webinars—rather than having new information just at the annual convention.

"I think it's important for the next generation to build those relationships," she said. "Established leaders have contacts and know people. It's good to cultivate that now."

Hexpol co-op program brings strong young talent

By Bruce Meyer

Rubber & Plastics News Staff

DYERSBURG, Tenn.—Hexpol Compounding's NAFTA business has taken one step toward bringing more young people into the rubber industry with its wide-ranging cooperative education program.

A total of 121 students have participated in the co-op program, which began in 2012, and 31 have become full-time Hexpol employees. The firm said 12 of Hexpol's NAFTA campuses participate in the program and it recruits from 20 different educational institutions throughout North America.

During the co-op, both undergraduate and graduate students work between 20 and 40 hours a week in paid positions that give them the chance to gain hands-on experience in their field of study while also being exposed to a diverse business environment training program.

"I won't say we've cured the ill of getting youth in the rubber industry, but we're starting to make a dent," said Randy Simpson, chief operating officer for Hexpol Compounding's NAFTA re-

gion. "If you interview some of these kids, they are extremely excited about what they do for us, the challenges we give them, and what they're learning in a short period of time."

A 36-year veteran of the rubber industry, Simpson is very involved in Hexpol's co-op program. He joined Hexpol in 2003 at the firm's Statesville, N.C., plant. The firm unsuccessfully tried to start a co-op program in 2005 with the University of Charlotte, and again in 2009 between the University of Akron and the firm's Middlefield, Ohio, operation.

But it wasn't until Hexpol NAFTA CEO Tracy Garrison met Don Purdy, who was the retired men's basketball coach with Belmont University in Nashville, Tenn., and also knew how universities worked.



Randy Simpson

"He joined us as a part-time associate, and he helped launch our co-op program that we have today," Simpson said.

The initial push was for chemical engineering because that's where Hexpol's biggest talent gaps were. The University of Akron, Ohio State University and Youngstown State University remain the hub colleges for chemical engineering students.

But when the firm shored up its ranks in there, it branched out to nearly all aspects of the business, with co-op students working in such areas as mechanical engineering, human resources, IT, sales and marketing, finance, and environmental health and safety.

"We challenge them, we give them projects, they make presentations to up-

per management," Simpson said. "We have a leadership development piece each is required to do. We're trying to equip them to go out into the world."

New in 2017 is the rotation program, which provides students with work experience at four different Hexpol sites: Middlefield and Burton, Ohio; Dyersburg, Tenn.; and Kennedale, Texas.

Grant Mercer, a Youngstown State student who worked in the rotation program at Middlefield and Dyersburg, said he learned about the rubber industry and gained sound business experience. "But what stands out the most is how great the Hexpol people are at both campuses," he said. "I've become more independent when needed, but realize the benefits of teamwork as well."

Simpson said the co-op program has been a huge boost for Hexpol as well. "I love these young kids, and I think they bring something to us," he said. "You have to have this youth. They see things differently. They feel things differently. ... We need it for sustainability long term of this industry, and we need it for the sustainability of Hexpol."