



# SONOCO SHAPES ITS FUTURE with Apprenticeship

**S**onoco's roots in South Carolina run so deep, they stretch back more than a century. Since its founding in 1899 in Hartsville, Sonoco has evolved into one of the largest diversified packaging companies in the world. As part of that evolution, Sonoco became one of the first to venture into the revolutionary technology of injection molding when it was first introduced more than 50 years ago. Today, Sonoco maintains a focus on innovation, making 95 percent of its products with custom injection molds, including the new TruVue® clear can, a revolutionary alternative to the traditional metal can.



To create the products of tomorrow, Sonoco's continued success will rely on a pipeline of highly skilled workers. Roger Schrum, vice president of investor relations and corporate affairs, and Andrea White, manager of global maintenance excellence, discuss the importance of using apprenticeships to mold and grow Sonoco's future workforce.

**EDGE:** *Tell us about your workforce – what unique skills are needed by your industry?*

**Andrea White:** We are seeking skilled trade workers, particularly mechanical

and electrical maintenance workers. Annually, we expect to hire approximately 100 skilled maintenance workers in our operations across the U.S. However, with 29 percent of our current hourly skilled population 55 years or older, our needs could increase to nearly 200 a year.

In addition to certified trade skills, we are also looking for individuals with solid soft skills, such as teamwork, punctuality, a good attitude, reliability and strong communications skills, among others.

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— ANDREA WHITE, MANAGER OF GLOBAL MAINTENANCE EXCELLENCE AT SONOCO

**EDGE:** *How did your company decide to become involved with Apprenticeship Carolina™?*

**ROGER SCHRUM:** Like many companies across the U.S., we want to create a pipeline of well-trained, skilled workers to grow with us. South Carolina’s apprenticeship program is a model for the rest of the nation, so it’s a win-win for Sonoco. We receive counsel from the best minds in the apprenticeship business while ensuring our company proactively grows our workforce. We needed to start from scratch, so we reached out to Apprenticeship Carolina.

**EDGE:** *How has Apprenticeship Carolina helped to design your program?*

**AW:** Apprenticeship Carolina has been incredibly helpful and informative as we move through establishing Sonoco’s apprenticeship program. Their team listened to our needs and offered us skilled suggestions based on their experience. They also arranged for us to meet with other companies that were well down the path of either establishing or running successful programs. These introductions proved extremely helpful as we navigated the process.



They also helped with developing the competencies needed for our apprenticeship program and connected us with local technical colleges that can teach these skills. The Apprenticeship Carolina network has been both local and far-reaching and has driven us to establish apprenticeship programs in other states as well. We would not have progressed with this program so quickly without Apprenticeship Carolina.

**EDGE:** *What are some of the challenges that you’ve faced while starting your apprenticeship program, and how has Apprenticeship Carolina helped to overcome them?*

**AW:** Establishing a strong apprenticeship program the right way can be a daunting task. We first brought all parties to the table: Apprenticeship Carolina, our human resources leaders, plant managers, communications professionals – everyone we could think of who would have a stake in developing, communicating and making the program a success.

Just like any huge change in the way a company works, we had to consider all scenarios from our standpoint and from the apprentices’ view, which was challenging. We relied on best practices to mold our program. Staying on track with action items was very important for our working group as well. Each team member had specific responsibilities in their area of expertise, and we met regularly to address action items.

**EDGE:** *Tell us about your plans for the first year of your apprenticeship program.*

**AW:** We are working to develop an apprenticeship program for

our skilled multi-craft position – Industrial Maintenance Reliability Technician. We are in the process of developing the list of competencies needed to work with mechanical and electrical components, hydraulics, pneumatics, robotics, PLCs, welding, TPM and reliability.

We are currently working with Florence-Darlington Technical College, the Southeastern Institute of Manufacturing Technology and Spartanburg Community College to determine which programs and courses will be required to fit our specific needs. We hope to have at least one apprentice at each of our South Carolina focus sites by the Fall of 2017 to work a 20/20 model – 20 hours of on-the-job training and 20 hours of course training to work toward an associate degree in Industrial Maintenance or Mechatronics.

**EDGE:** *Once the apprenticeship program is fully established, what are some of the long-term goals of your program?*

**RS:** Just like with any global company, our long-term goal is to fill our workforce pipeline with dedicated professionals who want to have a long career at Sonoco. Workforce development, specifically these types of positions, is a challenge for every manufacturing company right now. We spend a great amount of time trying to fill these types of positions, so if we can fill the pipeline, we can be assured we are hiring already trained, dedicated employees.

**EDGE:** *How do you think your company will benefit from an apprenticeship program?*

**RS:** First, if we can recruit the best

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## Sonoco’s Sustained Growth

Sonoco is a global provider of a variety of consumer packaging, industrial products, protective packaging and display and packaging supply chain services.

With annualized net sales of approximately \$4.8 billion, Sonoco has 20,000 employees working in more than 300 facilities in 33 countries, serving many of the world’s best-known brands in some 85 nations.

In the past year, Sonoco spent approximately \$315 million to acquire three consumer packaging companies. Sonoco acquired Peninsula Packaging Company – a leading manufacturer of thermoformed packaging for fresh fruit and vegetables – and Plastic Packaging, Inc. – a Hickory, North Carolina-based flexible packaging company. These businesses will add approximately \$230 million in annual sales and add approximately 1,000 associates. Late last year, the company also expanded its Protective Solutions segment, acquiring the assets and operations of Laminar Medica, a specialty medical products company in the United Kingdom and Czech Republic, as well as another company that enters Sonoco into the active temperature-controlled cargo containers market.

In early 2017, Sonoco launched the TruVue® clear can, a revolutionary alternative to the traditional metal can, alongside its first corporate partner, McCall Farms. New Glory Farms Slow-Cooked vegetables were introduced by McCall Farms exclusively in more than 400 Harris Teeter and Ingles stores in the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic States.



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— ROGER SCHRUM, VICE PRESIDENT OF INVESTOR RELATIONS AND CORPORATE AFFAIRS



apprentices, we will have the best talent. I also think associates who move through apprenticeship programs are likely to be your long-term employees who rise through positions at the company. They are invested. They know what to expect, and they excel in their professions more often than not.

**EDGE:** *How do you think your employees will benefit from apprenticeship?*

**AW:** The apprenticeship program will offer our associates an added opportunity to learn new skills and then directly apply them in operations where they are already a valuable team member. It will also create another advancement opportunity for current employees who have a desire to improve the reliability of our equipment.

**EDGE:** *What advice would you give to another company that is considering starting an apprenticeship program?*

**AW:** Start early. First and foremost, bring everyone to the table. Make certain you have clear action items. We used software that sends reminders and tracks progress on items so teams could work from the same page. Study best practices, and most importantly, ask Apprenticeship Carolina for advice early on. ■



## Midlands Tech Makes the Mold for Smithsonian Museum Event



**"It's really important for people to see how these skills can turn into a great career with the right kind of training."**

— Alan Clayton, MTC department chair for industrial technology



When faced with a shortfall of educational parts for an exhibit in the 2016 National Week of Making, the Smithsonian Museum turned to **Midlands Technical College (MTC)** for a solution.

"The Smithsonian needed several parts that were reverse engineered from famous inventions," said Alan Grier, MTC program coordinator for machine tool and mechatronics. "One was a solenoid (electromagnet) that was used in many inventions, including the Morse telegraph."

MTC machine tool students designed and made the mold for the solenoid spool to be used in the event. "We are lucky. Our shop has all the advanced equipment to make complex tooling like injection molds," Grier said.

After the mold was complete, MTC students produced 2,000 of these parts on MTC's 75-ton plastic injection molding machine. Grier drove the parts to Washington, D.C. just in time for the Smithsonian event, which was developed to celebrate makers across the U.S. and empower

participants of diverse ages and backgrounds to explore opportunities to innovate, create and build.

"The event was amazing," said Grier. "There were hundreds of students learning, having fun and building inventions using what MTC provided."

In addition to students and educational officials, about 2,000 members of the public attended the museum event and viewed the exhibits MTC helped create.

"Opportunities like this show young people how valuable industrial skills can be and the broad variety of career options that are available," said Alan Clayton, MTC department chair for industrial technology. "They get interested in the hands-on nature of the technologies, and it's really important for people to see how these skills can turn into a great career with the right kind of training."

To learn more about the diverse programs within the MTC Industrial Technology department, visit [www.midlandstech.edu](http://www.midlandstech.edu).