

# QUICKSTART®

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## Comfort Level

### Mattress Manufacturer Changes Lives in South Georgia

The Simmons Company, the country's second-largest mattress manufacturer, has the motto "Better Sleep Through Science." After the experience of their new plant in Waycross, they could add another: "Better Employees Through CMS."

Debuting in 1996, the Certified Manufacturing Specialist (CMS) program was an immediate success. Employers around the state quickly recognized the value of a standardized program training new and existing employees in the fundamental principles and processes of manufacturing.

But Simmons recently took CMS to a new level and discovered an even greater payoff in the program. Working with Okefenokee Technical College and Quick Start, Simmons made successful completion of CMS and Quick Start's pre-employment training



Above: A Simmons associate loads mattress material. Inset: The Simmons Company facility in Waycross, Ga.

a prerequisite before an applicant would be granted an interview at the newly built Ware County plant (*Get more detail about this project's timeline in "Partner's Perspective", page 11.*)

That was a big risk. But it paid off, and not just for the company. Not only did this innovative approach allow Simmons to find the best candidates available in Okefenokee Tech's six-county service area, but it also changed the lives of the successful graduates.



Display of Simmons' new line of products being marketed with the slogan "Better Sleep Through Science."





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“The value of the Quick Start and CMS training has more than just a monetary value,” said Michelle Morón, the Human Resources advisor at Simmons. “For many people, going through this process has been a life-changing decision. You can see it in their relationships with their families. You can see it in their smiles; you can see it in their eyes.”

“It teaches you how to work together, to share ideas,” said Osie Johnson, a recently hired CMS graduate. “And it really does carry over to your personal life.”

### The Challenge

Making 200 hours of training a requirement before an individual gets an interview – let alone gets hired – might sound like a barrier to attracting qualified applicants. But it turned out that the opposite was true. The courage and personal dedication needed to make that commitment produced some of the best associates in Simmons facilities nationwide.

“We are the success story at Simmons,” Morón said. “Our CEO said he had never been to a Simmons



Touring Simmons' Waycross facility were, from left, Quick Start's Director of Eastern Operations Ken Boyd; Okefenokee Tech VP of Economic Development Dr. Neil Aspinwall; Simmons Human Resources Advisor Michele Morón; Okefenokee Tech President Dr. John Pike; and Quick Start Training Coordinator Ron Russell.

facility where the people were as enthusiastic as at our facility here.”

“Simmons is establishing the benchmark for employee qualifications and team building,” said Ken Boyd, director of Quick Start's Eastern Operations. “This process is commendable and resulted in a highly motivated, energetic and committed group of new employees.”

Morón discovered that going

through the CMS and Quick Start training before being hired forged an unbreakable bond among successful graduates.

“Through CMS and Quick Start, they came together as a team,” said Morón. “And this makes the experience much more valuable.”

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Scenes from the plant floor of Simmons' Waycross facility.



“In the classes, everyone is on an equal basis, whether you’re young or old, whatever,” echoed graduate David Pickens. “It teaches everybody to listen to each other and work together no matter who you are. You use that kind of lesson in more than just the workplace.”

The first associates hired at Simmons knew right away that they were entering a new world when they were asked to become part of a team to help design how the plant itself was run. They chose a logo and wrote a purpose statement: “To passionately inspire each other. To strive for excellence, while empowering all to serve all.” And they came up with a name for the team: the “Dreamweavers.”

“This was a paradigm shift for both the employees and employers in the area,” said Morón.

Today, 176 associates are work-

ing together to assemble 600 mattresses and box springs per day, bringing a little more comfort into the lives of people across the country, just as a job at Simmons has helped them sleep a little easier in South Georgia.



*“We are the success story at Simmons.”*

– Michelle Morón,  
Simmons Human Resources Advisor

### True Partnership

But being a pioneer is never easy, Morón said. They couldn’t have implemented this new approach by themselves.

“Okefenokee Technical College and Quick Start were critical components,” Morón said. “The relationship we established right from the get-go was one of true partnership.”

“Without the partnership and emotion, this would not have been successful,” Morón added. “You have to have your heart in it and the faith that it would work, because it was all new to us.”

“In this part of the state, there aren’t too many jobs like this,” said Okefenokee Tech VP of Economic Development Dr. Neil Aspinwall. “Many of these people come from very challenging situations. And for them, this is a chance to succeed. And when they do, the sense of accomplishment is truly life-changing. It’s more than just applying for a job. It’s a chance to change their lives.”

## Raising the Bar on Basic Skills

CMS evolves as manufacturing grows more sophisticated

what is considered basic skills,” says Jackie Rohosky, assistant commissioner for Economic Development Programs. “By continually consulting with and getting input from the manufacturers themselves, we guarantee that the CMS curriculum is the best there is for teaching new and existing employees the skills they need to be effective in the 21st century manufacturing environment.”

First piloted in 1995 and then launched in 1996, the Certified Manufacturing Specialist program is the product of a unique collaboration between the Department of Technical and Adult Education and manufacturing businesses in Georgia.

Working with an advisory board composed of industry executives from around the state, the curriculum for CMS is continually being enhanced and refined to address the evolving needs of industry.

“As manufacturing becomes more sophisticated, the bar is steadily being raised on

