



CMS a Winner in South Georgia

By Dr. Neil Aspinwall

Since the service area for Okefenokee Technical College does not have a large industrial base, I had always envied the schools that had large industrial parks to offer potential clients. Without these resources, economic developers in our region are constantly being challenged to provide training and meet the needs of our customers. For a long time, we promoted the Certified Customer Service Specialist (CCSS) and the Certified Manufacturing Specialist (CMS) programs, and, although they were successful, I was confident that we could do better.

I came to the conclusion that a great way to get the programs jump-started was to get a business or industry to require the training as a condition for employment.

Eventually, that opportunity appeared. In 2003, Waycross and Ware County had a visit from an industry prospect, and the only thing we knew was that it was a manufacturer that invested heavily in its employees through quality training programs. As everyone who has ever courted a prospective industry knows, there are usually four or five other communities trying to lure the prospect to their areas. To our good fortune, Waycross finally made the short list.

I felt even more confident when company executives told us what type of training would be needed. I reviewed their list and noticed how similar it was to the competencies taught in the CMS program. At the next meeting with the company, I presented the CMS program and explained what the CMS curriculum could provide. One of the other partners at the table was Quick Start, and once the executives understood the relationship between Quick Start and Okefenokee Tech, their interest

increased. The company, of course, was the Simmons Company (the 2nd largest mattress manufacturer in the nation with over 18 plants in 17 different states), and in a short time executives decided to build their new facility in the Waycross/Ware County Industrial Park.

But the hard work had just begun. Simmons executives wanted to take their hiring process to the next level. They wanted an individual to complete the CMS program and go through an additional 40 hours of Quick Start's pre-employment training before he or she would be granted an interview. It was a daunting task, but the Simmons Company, the Okefenokee Area Development Authority, the Georgia Department of Labor and Okefenokee Tech began holding job fairs throughout several counties to get the word out.

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It was a great success. When a job fair was held at Okefenokee Tech, our auditorium was completely filled. Today, 12 months later, Okefenokee Tech has been running three to five CMS classes simultaneously, and Quick Start and Simmons have been providing the 40 additional hours of pre-employment training. To date, we have had over 375 individuals complete the CMS and CCSS programs. Although the students have to complete approxi-



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mately 200 hours of training before they are even granted an interview, the comments they make on the end of the course evaluations remain consistent. They believe by going through the training, they are better prepared to accomplish their personal career goals as well as the goals of their employer.

The partnership established among Simmons, Okefenokee Tech and Quick Start has been praised by the Simmons Company executives. They attribute the success of the start-up of their new manufacturing facility to the dedication and quality training provided through their partners. The end results have shown that using CMS and Quick Start is a winning formula. Now other industries in our area have realized the value of the CMS training program and are looking for individuals who have completed the training. This is just one more testimonial of how the technical colleges and Quick Start help improve the overall economic prosperity of Georgia. 

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