

QUICKSTART®



Workforce Training Supports Plastics Industry

I N S I D E

Plastics in Georgia 4
Wilden, Piolax and NACOM benefit from training

Kubota 8
Growing with Gainesville

HL-A 10
Bremen facility expanding



Quick Start and the Department of Technical and Adult Education have responded quickly and thoroughly to the needs of the state's plastics industry. The evolving relationship between companies like **Piolax**, **NACOM** and **Wilden** and the agency tells the story of a growing industry that has thrived on this interdependence.

During the 1990s it became clear that plastics workforce training was essential, and that a lack of trained personnel was going to cramp the formation and growth of new plastics companies across the state. Companies were coming up empty in the search for workers who knew the secrets of mold making, extrusion and injection molding.

"We were badly in need of mold makers and other skilled workers who could turn their talents to plastics," explains Gary Gray, manager of human resources for the **Piolax Corporation** in Canton. "They were a dying breed. We went to Appalachian Technical College and presented our problem. Since then, and with the help of the wonderful people at Appalachian Tech, we've been able to grow, knowing that a pool of trained workers is being created. We have, traditionally, a low turnover rate thanks to this training," he adds. Most of the company's workers come from Cherokee and Pickens counties, but **Piolax** also draws from nearby counties, such as Forsyth, Fannin and Gilmer.

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In the last ten years, plastics companies moving to North Georgia have had a tremendous economic impact in the area. They brought with them good jobs with higher wages and a need for highly skilled workers. They have helped to grow our labor force and opened our eyes to the need for training in the plastics field. Piolax is a great industry partner!

NANCY PROFFITT
PRESIDENT
APPALACHIAN TECHNICAL COLLEGE



- 1 Piolax President Yoichi Okitsu.
- 2 Nancy Proffitt, President, Appalachian Technical College.
- 3 Gary Gray, Manager of Human Resources, and Clyde Melton, Vice President of Manufacturing at Piolax.
- 4 Dr. Peter Lohage, President and CEO, Wilden Plastics USA.
- 5 L-R: Piolax employees Peter Sharp, Tool Maker; Joe Satterfield, Engineer; Walter Alfredo, Machine Operator; Randy Thompson, Production Manager; and George Lavendar; Production Supervisor.
- 6 Danny Waldrop (left) and David Worley work on an injection mold at Piolax in Canton.

Fine plastics companies, such as Wilden,

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Several other companies joined in the effort to get a program up and running at Appalachian Tech. Seed money was obtained for an instructor and now the school boasts a successful Mold/Tool and Die Maker program.

Piolax manufactures fasteners for the automotive industry. Some of its biggest customers include Nissan, Honda, and Ford. Many of the small, but essential details that make our lives more livable can be found on production lines at **Piolax**. Visor and seatbelt clips, radiator grille clips, and fuel tank components, as well as air dampers that gracefully open and close glove boxes and cup holders, are just a few of **Piolax's** products. There are 61 plastic-injection molding machines in use at the Canton plant now, and the company plans to have a total of 100 in operation within the next five years.

Three Japanese cherry trees welcome the visitor to the Canton facility, commemorating the tie to the company's headquarters in Japan. **Piolax**, which

originated in Japan back in the 1930s, has had a close relationship with Nissan since that time. So when Nissan decided to set up a plant in Smyrna, Tenn., **Piolax** wasn't far behind.

Piolax is now about to undergo its third expansion, increasing its facility by 30,000 square feet. Quick Start has been part of each of these expansions, and Appalachian Tech continues to provide long-term training and education. The company employs approximately 170 Georgians.

David Worley is one Georgian who has benefited from the **Piolax**/Appalachian Tech relationship. Worley, who has been employed full-time as an apprentice at **Piolax**, has just completed his course of study at Appalachian Technical College and is now a Certified Mold/Tool and Die Maker. Jack Godfrey, Piolax supervisor, served as David's apprenticeship mentor.

Wilden Plastics also has benefited from its relationship with Quick Start and the Department of Technical and

Adult Education. A leader in the production of high-grade plastic products,

Wilden is headquartered in Germany and has facilities in Switzerland, Italy, Sweden, the Czech Republic and the United States. The Peachtree City location serves as the company's only North American facility, so it is very important to be able to hire and retain qualified employees.

Wilden's need for trained personnel has led to a continuing partnership with Griffin Tech. Six years ago, the company approached the school to request assistance with training. With the help of the school's president, Dr. Coy Hodges, the pilot for the now successful mold-making apprenticeship program was developed. **Wilden** typically accepts one apprentice per year.

"When Quick Start and **Wilden** asked if we could help them train qualified mold-makers, we knew it would stretch the educational programs we had in place," says Hodges. "We were happy to work to meet that need, and the apprenticeship program has been very



Piolax and NACOM, have benefited from DTAE plastics programs.

successful. We hope it will continue to grow.”

Currently, five companies arrange apprenticeships through Griffin Tech, and nine companies work with Appalachian Tech. The program has been so successful for Griffin Tech that the school is expanding its curriculum to include a full plastics technology program. Hodges explains, “It’s an expanding market, and the companies need trained employees. We want to be the provider of training and education for the plastics industry in Georgia.”

Around the world, **Wilden** produces everything from cell phone screens to inhalers to state-of-the-art plastic horseshoes. The Georgia facility focuses on three divisions of the company’s products: medical and diagnostics, technical and industrial, and smart cards.

Smart cards are one of **Wilden’s** specialties. The cards are similar to credit cards in size and appearance, but the difference is that there is a space to insert a small computer chip. The card

can be used as a credit card or a check card, but also can be used to store and process information, such as banking information and balances, making it a much more useful tool. **Wilden** exports approximately 10 million cards each month to Central America, South America, Europe and Asia.

The company also has new projects on the horizon, and is in the process of hiring more employees to meet the demand. The Peachtree City facility currently has about 70 employees, with plans to increase that number by a third in the immediate future. Dr. Peter Lohage, president and CEO, believes the company’s 50 years of experience will serve it well as the industry advances. He says, “We are a full service supplier, and we continue our research and development. Our expertise in developing products and manufacturing is well known throughout the industry.”

Lohage is excited about the coming expansion. “As it stands right now, we should quadruple our production within

18 months. We’re hiring, and we will be buying new machines and equipment. The company has spent time changing the mix of divisions and products, so now we are ready to focus on growing. This is a very exciting time.”

NACOM Corporation of Griffin is another plastics giant that has benefited from the state’s plastics training.

Brian Burk, the company’s manager of training, recently noted that **NACOM** has enjoyed a long and prosperous relationship with Quick Start.

“The training available through Quick Start has been an important part of our growth and expansions. Its customized training has allowed us to focus on implementing new technologies with a highly trained workforce,” says Burk.

And with apprenticeship programs like the ones at Griffin Tech and Appalachian Tech, and the state-of-the-art plastics lab at Albany Tech, these companies will be assured of a skilled workforce for many years to come. **QS**