MERCEDES-BENZ STUDENT PATHWAYS

Building an ongoing pipeline of skilled talent

SUMMARY

- In 1997, Mercedes-Benz U.S. International, Inc. (MBUSI) opened its plant in Tuscaloosa County, AL to fulfill the goal of assembling the M-Class Sport Utility Vehicle for the worldwide market.
- With the additional products being added to the production lines inside the plant, which were increasingly more complex, and with the continued advancement of manufacturing equipment, MBUSI recognized the importance of developing a pipeline of skilled talent.
- In 2011, discussions led to the creation of two student-training programs: the Industrial Maintenance Mechatronics program and the Mercedes TECH advanced automotive technology program. Since then, MBUSI has also added a high school apprenticeship.

In 1993, Daimler AG (now known as Mercedes-Benz Group AG) announced that it would build its first passenger vehicle assembly facility in the United States. After an extensive search, the company chose Tuscaloosa County, Alabama as the home for the $300 million plant. Mercedes-Benz U.S. International, Inc. (MBUSI) was formed to fulfill the goal of assembling the M-Class Sport Utility Vehicle for the worldwide market. In 1997, with 1,100 excited Team Members, the Alabama-assembled M-Class went on sale in September of that year. With original projections of 65,000, the M-Class was met with overwhelming demand, which soon led to an additional investment and a plant expansion.

Because of the success, Mercedes-Benz Group AG has continually invested, expanded, and more than tripled capacity at MBUSI which also led to additional Mercedes-Benz products for the Alabama facility. With the additional products, all of which are increasingly more complex, and with the continued advancement of manufacturing equipment, MBUSI recognized the importance of developing a pipeline of skilled talent.

In 2011, with direction from Markus Schäfer, then President and CEO of MBUSI (currently Member of the Board of Management Mercedes-Benz Group AG, and Chief Technology Officer), MBUSI initiated discussions with Shelton State Community College for the development of two student training programs: Industrial Maintenance Mechatronics and Mercedes TECH. In early 2011, MBUSI enlisted the assistance of experienced technical training masters from Germany to support the development of both programs. From this initial approach, MBUSI expanded the student opportunities in 2021 with a partnership with West Alabama Works and area secondary school systems to support the implementation of a high school apprenticeship through a program called Modern Manufacturing (MM). This program promotes manufacturing and provides an opportunity for students to be exposed to and learn the basic skills that they will need to start a career in manufacturing.

"MBUSI's commitment to being the best luxury automotive facility in North America is most evident in our workforce."

MICHAEL GÖBEL, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF MBUSI

With Mercedes-Benz Group AG support and knowledge of the apprenticeship models in Germany, the Mechatronics and TECH programs were launched in the fall of 2012 through a partnership with Shelton State Community College. The sole purpose of the Mechatronics program is to maintain a continual pipeline of new talent for the maintenance technician role. With these first students participating in 2012, MBUSI began the process of developing their own pipeline for skilled talent right in Alabama. The Industrial Maintenance Mechatronics program prepares students for a potential role as a maintenance technician.

Partnering with the Shelton State Community College, participants have seven semesters of coursework combined with hands-on training at MBUSI in Tuscaloosa. The final three semesters include a shadowing maintenance mentorship, where students learn from current maintenance technicians on-the-job. Upon completion of the program, students earn an Associate of Applied Sciences degree in Industrial Electronics and a short certificate in Industrial Maintenance. An additional 18 months of training awaits those students that meet a certain criterion. The additional training, formerly known as IMMAP (Industrial Maintenance Mechatronics Apprenticeship Program), consists of advanced technical training and mentorship in various maintenance positions throughout the facility. Upon completion of either track, successful students earn a full-time position at MBUSI.

The Mercedes TECH program prepares students for a potential role as a repair technician. The program consists of advanced technician training involving the SUVs produced at MBUSI and mentorship with experienced technicians. Partnering with four area State of Alabama Community Colleges, students are trained in the fundamental skills associated with Mercedes-Benz vehicle technology. While attending classes at the area colleges, students receive both theory and hands-on training and experience in the production areas, as well as training in several areas specific to automotive technology. Training is conducted with donated Mercedes-Benz SUVs right at the local college they attend. For those students that demonstrate exceptional skills and aptitude toward automotive technical skills, they begin a four-month training period that consists of Mercedes-Benz specific automotive technical training and mentorship with experienced technicians. Successful students earn full-time positions at MBUSI.

The Modern Manufacturing (MM) high school apprenticeship program began in the fall of 2021 and was developed in partnership with West Alabama Works and area secondary school systems, along with input from local industry. The MM apprenticeship program provides high school students an opportunity to gain necessary skills for entry level manufacturing jobs. Modern Manufacturing started with just a few local high schools and now has grown to involve as many as 24 high schools across the state of Alabama. Currently, there are over 400 students involved in the MM apprenticeship throughout the West Alabama area and several students are working at MBUSI. High school students, beginning in the 10th grade, can enter the MM apprenticeship program and have an opportunity to work on a part-time basis with MBUSI.

"With the production launch of the ground-breaking M-Class 25 years ago, Mercedes-Benz helped put our state on the cutting-edge of automotive manufacturing. With the opening of this new battery plant, Alabama is helping Mercedes accelerate its production of industry leading electric vehicles. We're proud to call Mercedes a partner, and we're excited about the future that we are building together in Alabama."

KAY IVEY, GOVERNOR OF ALABAMA

Students come out of the program with five to seven stackable credentials, with the possibility of earning a two-year associate degree, an apprenticeship, and full-time job. From the MM apprenticeship program, students have a choice of several career paths, including entering one of MBUSI's community college programs, entering an entry-level production role, or continuing their education into other career fields. MM students are registered with the Alabama Office of Apprenticeship.

Currently, there are over 4,000 Team Members employed at the Tuscaloosa County, Mercedes-Benz assembly facility with an estimated additional 10,000 indirect jobs at suppliers and service providers in the region. MBUSI's community college student programs continue to be very successful. "MBUSI's commitment to being the best luxury automotive facility in North America is most evident in our workforce," said Michael Göbel, President and CEO of MBUSI. "As our operations continue to accelerate and evolve, we are growing the team we've built with additional support on a local level." Since the inception of Mercedes TECH and Mechatronics training programs in 2012, many graduating students have earned rewarding careers at MBUSI, with over 30 Mercedes TECH graduates becoming repair technicians and over 80 Mechatronics graduates accepting positions as maintenance technicians. Several graduates have also moved into leadership roles within the organization. Students are attracted to the programs from all areas within and outside the State of Alabama.