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Chrysler Group Expands Minds and Facility at its World Class Manufacturing Academy

- Adds 15,000 square feet of interactive training for manufacturing employees
- More than 9,000 participants trained since grand opening in 2012
- Now teaching 45 different hands-on classes; originally started with four classes

April 27, 2014, Warren, Mich. - After officially [opening more than two years ago](#), the final touches on a significant expansion in both square-footage and educational programming at Chrysler Group's World Class Manufacturing (WCM) Academy were completed early this year. With an original footprint of 25,000 square feet, the WCM Academy now occupies approximately 40,000 square feet, including the addition or redesign of six hands-on learning stations and two new classrooms.

More than 9,000 employees have participated in collaborative classes at the Academy since its launch in 2012. Starting with just four classes at the grand opening in 2012, the Academy now teaches 45 different classes.

"The WCM Academy has become a critical resource in furthering our employees' understanding of the WCM methodology," said Marcel Breault, Head of World Class Manufacturing, Chrysler Group LLC. "The more people we can train and the more classes we can offer, the faster we are able to accelerate the pace of change across our North American facilities and continue to deliver measurable results in all of our operations."

With 10 pillars representing the 10 technical pillars of WCM adorning the outside of the building, the WCM Academy, housed at the UAW-Chrysler Technology Training Center, is a place where employees throughout Chrysler Group's manufacturing operations can come to learn the WCM methodology, use the WCM tools and collaborate to find the best solutions to issues within their facilities.

First implemented by Fiat in 2006 and introduced to Chrysler Group as part of the alliance between the two companies in June 2009, WCM is a methodology that focuses on reducing waste, increasing productivity, and improving quality and safety in a systematic and organized way. It engages the workforce to provide and implement suggestions on how to improve their jobs and their plants, and has become the motivator behind the improvements in all of Chrysler Group's manufacturing plants. Already in 2014, two facilities have been recognized for their achievements in implementing WCM. The Windsor Assembly Plant (Ont.) earned a WCM silver award and the Trenton Engine Complex (Mich.) received bronze status, joining three other bronze facilities – Toledo Assembly Complex (Ohio), Dundee Engine (Mich.) and Saltillo Truck Assembly (Mex.).

"The expansion of the WCM Academy allows us to provide new techniques and solutions to the challenges faced at our manufacturing facilities every day," said Scott Tolmie, Lead – World Class Manufacturing Academy, Chrysler Group LLC. "In helping develop solutions together, we continue to improve our manufacturing processes and the quality of the vehicles our consumers drive."

Among the many unique aspects of the Academy are the curriculum and the trainers. Course material is created internally with input from the plants and based on specific needs to increase levels of competence in a defined area. Hands-on games and activities create competition and help take the mystery out of WCM. To deliver the course material, trainers are selected from within the Company who have hands-on, practical experience achieving WCM results in their facility.

Unlike past training programs, only 30 percent of the learning is done in the classrooms. The other 70 percent of a

participant's time is spent participating in hands-on activities in the laboratory and in their home plant workshops. Because of the flexibility of the lab, the training modules and course materials can be modified and adapted as needed to meet the requirements of the plants.

Expanded WCM Academy brings greater opportunities for learning

As a result of increased demand and tangible results, Chrysler Group, together with support from the UAW, has expanded the Warren location's laboratory and developed new course material, [launched a Mobile Unit](#) for distant plants, created a satellite academy in Mexico, and implemented online training, available for all levels of the company.

"The UAW has been a vital part of the success of the Academy and a true partner in helping drive WCM implementation through our plants," said Breault. "With their support, we continue to solidify a positive future for Chrysler Group."

As part of the 15,000 square-foot expansion, the WCM Academy has added two new classrooms with seating for about 130 total participants and redesigned six hands-on learning stations. Additionally, the Academy was able to incorporate a Workplace Integration (WPI) Room as a critical piece of a five-day learning program designed to help facilities launching a new product. In a WPI room, every operation in every work station on the line is reviewed, best practices evaluated and processes verified before a single vehicle is built.

In preparation for the launch of the 2015 Chrysler 200, nearly 100 employees from the Sterling Heights (Mich.) Assembly Plant participated in the WPI class, then brought their knowledge and learnings back to others at the plant. The WPI Room coupled with a new Go-Cart Assembly Line allowed participants to practice the WPI technique. Using the assembly of a child's go-cart to simulate a real vehicle, every assembly line job was mapped out and tested on the go-cart line. Participants identified issues on the go-cart line, then returned to the WPI room to develop solutions.

Another addition as part of the Academy's expansion is the Comau Robot Cell, consisting of two robots found in many of Chrysler Group's body shops. This station teaches participants to focus on maintenance through sense awareness. Participants are taught to be familiar with the sights and sounds of the robots so it is easier to help predict when maintenance is needed. Being proactive in maintaining the robots reduces the chance of repairing them in the future which means less downtime on the line.

The Academy's learning environment has even expanded beyond the walls of the Warren, Mich., facility to the Mobile Unit. The Academy on wheels brings hands-on classes straight to the plants to increase WCM know-how and broaden its implementation. Since launching in late 2013, the Mobile Unit has hosted nearly 1,800 employees.

Earlier this month, Chrysler Group's operations in Mexico opened a satellite Academy in the Company's Saltillo Truck Assembly Plant, which will serve all five manufacturing facilities in Mexico.

While not taking up any physical space, the WCM Academy has also implemented online courses in conjunction with the expansion. Now hosting 11 online classes, this latest e-learning programming is designed to establish a baseline of knowledge for employees who visit the Academy, while supplementing the hands-on experience gained by taking courses at the Academy. Each module includes a multimedia display that features a voiceover to enhance the visual presentation, while including game-like quizzes scattered throughout the modules to give students instant feedback on their progress.

"Our UAW-represented workforce is proud to lead the driving change at Chrysler Group's manufacturing facilities," said Gary Reid, WCM Academy Joint Lead, UAW. "Empowering employees to take ownership in improving what they live and breathe every day is truly rewarding to everyone involved."

The Original WCM Academy Labs

Although there are many new elements to the Academy, some of the original courses and labs continue to reinforce important concepts.

One of the first stations in the lab is the safety area. Employing the same 3D technology used by the U.S. Department of Defense to train soldiers deployed to Afghanistan, participants don 3D goggles to become fully immersed in a plant

setting full of unsafe acts and conditions. Through several videos highlighting various situations, participants become aware of unsafe conditions, identify potential risks and work through possible solutions within the three dimensional manufacturing environment. While only currently used in the safety area, the 3D technology could be expanded to other pillars.

The Human Motion Capture Arena uses the same technology used to create video games. A participant dresses in a suit with sensors that capture the individual's movements, from the largest such as walking to the slightest such as the movement of a finger. By seeing how an operator would move to perform a given job function, improvements can be made to reduce the number of movements or make the movements more complementary to a person's natural movements, thereby reducing waste. By employing this technology, the walking distance during a single operation was reduced from 23,000 cm to just 7,000 cm.

Even a popular children's toy is used to teach WCM methodology. A slot car track helps demonstrate the seven steps of micro-stoppages, small equipment breakdowns that can cause major losses. The cars on the track and the track itself are altered to "breakdown" while racing. A high speed camera captures the movements, helping participants see that there might be more to the breakdown than what is obvious to the naked eye. In this way, operators are trained to apply a disciplined process to find the root cause of a problem.

Door panel lines have traditionally been an area where there can be lots of waste – waste in how parts are delivered to the line, waste in how operators need to move to retrieve the parts. To help participants visualize where and how improvements can be made, the Academy has incorporated a simulated door line to teach the idea of kitting or mizusumashi. In the exercise, all of the parts are initially located line side, then participants are taught how to create kits that will reduce inventory and material handling while mistake proofing the assembly process for the operator.

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