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United Way of Greater Stark County Helps Local High School Students Get Connected

(Canton, OH) December 14, 2017 – “This is the happiest I’ve ever been.” These were the words of Terras Jones, a recent McKinley High School graduate who is currently employed as a welder for Ohio Gratings, Inc. As a Technical Education welding student at McKinley, Jones and his classmates participated in United Way of Greater Stark County’s Get Connected program, which provided his first exposure to this workplace.

The goal of Get Connected is to introduce students to employers and careers available in our community, while helping students learn to network with area professionals working in that field or trade. Jones honed his welding skills in class and worked with TimkenSteel welders in a Get Connected Afterschool Welding Program at the school. Ohio Gratings began working with the class during Jones’ senior year - bringing materials into class to show students the kind of welding skills being utilized at Ohio Gratings, and even providing students in the afterschool program with “swag bags” filled with accoutrements to help them launch their welding careers. Jones and three other students in the class were hired at Ohio Gratings following their graduation in May 2017, and have been employed there full-time ever since.

Jones’ story illustrates the importance of helping students of all socio-economic backgrounds build mentoring relationships with employees from local business. In addition to hands-on work, students establish relationships with Get Connected business partner employees, who share honest and frank advice gained from experiences and challenges in their own lives. “Most students, especially those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, don’t realize the amazing employers and job opportunities that are available in their own backyard,” said Laurie Moline, creator and administrator of the UWGSC Get Connected program. “Our goal with Get Connected is to tap into the heart and workforce needs of great companies like Ohio Gratings to help inspire students, open their eyes to potential that exists for their lives, and provide mentors who can help along the way.”

Now evolving into a role as a mentor, Jones shared his own advice with McKinley welding juniors, who recently attended a Get Connected event at Ohio Gratings. “When I enrolled in welding, I didn’t really take it seriously. But when I started getting involved with Get Connected, I started realizing I really might be able to have a career doing this.” He told the students that his first day on the job was terrible. “I laid on the bench on my break and said ‘I can’t do this’. But you just have to keep with it. Now I like coming to work. I can buy things I want. I can help my family with bills. It is the happiest I have ever been in my life.”

“Our Get Connected program is one way we partner with local businesses to bring lasting, positive change to Greater Stark County, and focus on our Bold Goal impact areas of Health, Education and Financial Stability,” explains UWGSC President & CEO Maria Heege. “By providing access to important vocational training and mentorship opportunities for local students, we build a stronger community.”

Get Connected is actively recruiting business partners who would like to help mold the workforce of the future. Visit www.uwstark.org/Get-Connected or email laurie.moline@uwstark.org for more information.

About United Way of Greater Stark County

United Way of Greater Stark County fights for the Health, Education and Financial Stability of every person in every community. The agency collaborates, convenes, and partners to support programs and initiatives that break the cycle of poverty, promote a healthy community where children are successful from kindergarten through graduation to a career, and where families have the tools, skills, and support they need to become financially independent. We win by living United. Visit www.uwstark.org for more information about United Way of Greater Stark County. Offices are at 401 Market Avenue North, Suite 300, Canton, Ohio 44702. (330) 491-0445.

About Ohio Gratings, Inc.

Ohio Gratings is the only privately owned, full-line grating manufacturer in North America. The company was built on bedrock values that are a launch pad to industry-leading vision and product offering. In the simplest terms, bar grating supports weight, circulates airflow and enhances architectural design. The company understands the need for these products to integrate safely and seamlessly into customer projects. It's why so many rely on Ohio Gratings for design, manufacturing and custom fabrication services. For more information, visit www.ohiogratings.com.

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