

Sevier County Economic Development Council presents

Industrial **CAREERS**

of the Great Smoky Mountains

Serving Gatlinburg, Pigeon Forge and Sevierville

*With boundless
entertainment
and natural beauty
at its back door,
there's still plenty
of work to be done
in Sevier County*

Smoky Mountain industrial jobs directory inside

Skilled trades paved the road to the top for REP's Williams

At Sevier County's newest industrial business, one member of the management team is an excellent example of grabbing every opportunity to succeed.

Derek Williams, Rep Corp's national sales director, in charge of the United States, Canada and Mexico for the rubber injection company — has risen to his position through one key factor. He calls it "stick-to-it-iveness."

It all started with his realization that he didn't want to be a baker.

"My great-grandfather was a baker, my grandfather owned a commercial bakery," the relocated Canadian said. "And when my father finished college he chose to enter a much larger commercial bakery, Pillsbury Bakeries as a baking chemist. Following my grandfather's retirement and ultimate selling of his bakery there wasn't a natural progression into the family business for me. I wasn't wasn't white-collar material. In high school, I lacked some clear directions."

But he did listen.

"We had these career days where everybody would file into the auditorium and listen to somebody speak," he recalled. The speaker talked about the value of trade careers.

Getting a start working in the baking industry with help from his dad, he eventually became a technician and then an industrial mechanic. That led to a job with the Neilson-Cadbury chocolate factory.

From there, Williams took over a manufacturing plant that specialized in rubber molding.

"I knew nothing about rubber molding, but I had a foundation of technical skills," he said. At that facility, the ownership gave him a budget and



As a kid, he worked on motorcycles and snowmobiles in his native Canada. After starting as maintenance technician, Derek Williams is now national sales director for Rep Corp, covering all of North America.

tasked him with acquiring equipment to grow the company.

Seeking the most for his money, the 24-year-old got to work buying used and run-down machines from the U.S. He would then scour the countryside for parts he could rebuild to bring them back to life, often good as new.

One day a salesman from French company REP International, the manufacturer of those very machines, paid a visit to Williams' plant.

"He saw the (injection) press," Williams said. "The last time he saw it, it was in somebody's warehouse covered in dirt because it was worn out. And here it is (good as new). They offered me a job."

Today, he's the national sales director for REP International's North American subsidiary, REP Corp.

That's why Williams is a big advocate for technical education and the opportunities it can provide to modern job seekers.

"It's important for the young kids today

to see that instant gratification doesn't exist," he said. "But, if you start with the fundamental foundation of a technical skill, apply yourself with additional education that you've earned, nobody can take that skill away. It can transcend industries and can be applied to many disciplines.

Rep Corp occasionally offers opportunities for employees with similar technical skills. The facility in Kodak will be hub for sales, service and replacement parts and rebuilding activities for all of North America.

Its machines are used for all manner of molded rubber injection. Customers use the custom-built presses for a nearly limitless number of applications, including automotive engine gaskets, fuel system O-rings and even the gaskets that cushion your closing car doors.

REP has relocated its headquarters from Bartlett, Illinois, to Kodak, and the company will employ roughly 20 people at the Sevier County location.