

Jiffy Steamers handcrafted in Obion County

By DONNA RYDER
Associate Editor

Many companies in this community, this nation and this world could learn a thing or two from Jiffy Steamer in Obion County when it comes to its employees.

Clint Joiner, who helps run the plant at the long-time steamer production business, said that the company stays away from traditional job titles because it encourages a "whatever it takes mentality."

"It is truly a teamwork effort. You never hear the words 'that's not my job,'" he said, adding, "We don't want fences inside our company. We want a workforce that is cross-trained and able to perform job functions at different stages of the production process."

Jiffy Steamer was founded in Chicago in 1940 and was moved to this area in 1958 by the founder, the late John B. Simrell.

Some of the associates are blood relatives and some are not, but they are all family. Joiner said that attitude is thanks to a culture of "hiring right, setting high expectations and taking care of your associates." Most employees get their jobs through internal referrals.

One of the longer serving employees is Mary Jean McKinney of South Fulton, who started working for Simrell in 1958. She said after working at Jiffy Steamer for a year, she decided she wanted to move to the big city of Chicago. She said he was gracious enough to contact a friend, who then offered her a job. She worked in Chicago for 10 years before returning to Obion County and Jiffy Steamer in 1972.

She said she was very glad the company agreed to take her back. "Chicago was not for me," she said.

Ms. McKinney, who performs quality control checks at the plant, said she enjoys

working there and is not thinking about retiring any time soon.

Joiner said she is a faithful employee.

Another dedicated employee is Bud Chilcutt, also of South Fulton. He has been working for Jiffy Steamer for 47 years and he also has no plans for retirement.

"As long as I feel good, I will continue to work," he said.

"It's a good place to work. They treat you right if you do your job," Chilcutt said as he labeled shipments going out through UPS and FedEx.

Production and quality control lead David Simrell of Union City has been at Jiffy Steamer since 1981. He said, "The company is full of employees who truly care about their jobs and the products they produce every day."

Carol Pounds of South Fulton will be celebrating her 37th year with the company this October. She said, "It is the best place to work. They treat you like family from day one," adding the day she started to work, partner Bill Simrell said, "We take care of our employees."

She said she appreciates the safe manner in which they work, touting the accident-free record. On the day of The Messenger's visit earlier this month, there had been 452,527 continuous accident-free production man hours.

"I enjoy every minute and I don't dread coming into work," she said, adding she is thankful that "the good Lord put me here and opened the door."

That same door was opened for Bob Flowers of Rutherford, who has been at Jiffy Steamer for 35 years. He had previously been a construction worker who reported to the job site to build an addition to



LONG-TIME EMPLOYEE — South Fulton resident Mary Jean McKinney started working for Jiffy Steamer in 1958 before deciding after just one year to move to Chicago. When she moved back to Obion County in 1972, she returned to work at the local company and has

remained a loyal employee since that day. She said she has no plans to retire and enjoys her days on the job. Ms. McKinney performs quality checks, looking for leaks on parts for the popular steamers. (See related story and photo, Page 1.)

the facility where he currently works. Though he had no other connection to the company, his position helped his grammar school classmate David Gammons of Rutherford get a job there 28 years ago.

Gammons, who had experience with sheetrock and carpentry work, said Flowers referred him and the company put him to work immediately.

Both men, as are other employees, are cross-trained. Flowers, who takes care of the international shipping, said he has done all the jobs in the plant except painting the units.

Gammons is the repair technician, but he does other work when his tasks

have been completed.

He said he troubleshoots problems with customers and recommends replacement parts. He can also connect them with one of the more than 1,000 dealers around the world.

Joe Townsend of Union City started working for Jiffy Steamer when he was 23 years old. That was 26 years ago.

"You can't beat it. They treat you good and are very personable. They have an open door policy and a family-type atmosphere," he said.

And while the atmosphere may be family-like, for some employees nearly every day is a family reunion.

Betsy Barnes of Mayfield,

Ky., said she has two brothers, an aunt and an uncle working at Jiffy Steamer. She drives 30 miles, one way, to be at work and said she wouldn't change it. "They are very generous and very kind," she said.

Ms. Barnes, who works in the international order department, said the employees always get along and enjoy working together.

She said once someone gets a job there, usually the only way they leave is by getting fired or passing away. "Not many people quit," she said, adding, "This is the best place in the world to work."

Her uncle, Mike Barnes of Water Valley, Ky., agrees.

The now 70-year-old

used to milk cows for a living but wanted a change in his life, so he drove a truck for a year. Then he started working for Jiffy Steamer. That was 24 years ago this coming October.

"There's not a better place in this world to work. We get along like one big happy family. The people, the atmosphere, the owners, you just can't beat them," he said, adding, "I can't say enough good about this family and this product. I am one of the happiest people in this world. There is not a better place, as far as I am concerned. It's home."

Associate Editor Donna Ryder can be contacted by email at dryder@ucmessenger.com.



DELIVERY READY — When Jiffy Steamer receives orders for parts or other equipment for its steamers, Bud Chilcutt of South Fulton helps get the boxes labeled and the products shipped through UPS or

FedEx. He has been employed at the local company for 47 years. He said as long as he feels good, he will continue to work. "It's a good place to work. They treat you right," he said.



REPAIR MAN — Jiffy Steamer repair technician David Gammons of Rutherford is one of many employees at the local company who received his job thanks to the internal referral program. He said he

got his job 28 years ago when his grammar school friend, Bob Flowers of Rutherford, recommended him. Gammons said Bill Simrell put him to work the day he filled out his application.



HOSE ASSEMBLY — Four-year employee Jason Matherly of Troy worked to assemble hoses at Jiffy Steamer near Union City recently. He said the company is like a "home away from home." He said management makes sure employees have what they need. "They take good care of us," he said.

 Jiffy Steamer



NEWER EMPLOYEE — Barry McDaniel of Union City is among the few employees at Jiffy Steamer who don't yet have a double-digit in their longevity column. He's only worked for the company for 4½ years and said he considers himself fortunate that someone decided to retire, opening a position for him to be hired. On a recent work day, he was packing a Jiffy Steamer in a box, along with its manual, funnel, hose and rod set.



HELPFUL TOOLS — Twenty-eight-year Jiffy Steamer employee Bryan Cranford of Hornbeak used a semi-automated screwdriver to install a metal base on a steamer being assembled at the local business, which celebrates its 77th anniversary this year. The company installed the semi-automated equipment to help employees who once had to tighten screws by hand. The equipment helps reduce repetitive motion injuries.