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Brittany Westerberg • bwesterber@argusleader.com • July 16, 2008

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Achieve workers see their work



Chad Bult, an employee at Bell Inc., moves a pallet built at South Dakota Achieve. These pallets were built for Wells Dairy of Le Mars, Iowa. Achieve workers got to see their work Tuesday. (April Gregory / Argus Leader)

Employees from vocational trainer for disabled tour plant to see pallets they made

Workers with South Dakota Achieve, a nationally accredited support-service provider to people with disabilities, got to see how their handiwork is used Tuesday. They were touring a Bell Inc. plant in Sioux Falls.

As part of Achieve's vocational training programs, where they teach people with disabilities skills needed for certain jobs, the program entered into a contract to make wood shipping pallets for Bell. The company uses those pallets - 400 per month - to ship the paperboard packaging that they make for Wells Dairy of Le Mars, Iowa.

Bell is a nationally recognized leader in the packaging industry, the largest importer in South Dakota and a major employer in the Sioux Empire region.

We thought it would be a great idea to have the folks who are making the pallets come out and see how we make the ice cream packaging ... and how it ends up on a pallet that they built," said Marianne Von Seggern, vice president of strategic development for Bell.

Justin Heeren is one of those production workers, and he was glad he got to see how the pallets they make are being used. He's worked there for four months and said he enjoys the job.

"I think they're doing good work with people with disabilities," he said.

Bell has worked with Achieve for 11 years on various projects.

"Cooperations like this serve several purposes, but most importantly it is an opportunity to teach people work skills," said Rick DiSanto, vice president of day services and production with Achieve. "It's used as a training tool, and those people who are trained will hopefully end up in other community employment situations."

DiSanto said that Achieve's pallet and crate building operations work with about 60 different customers in the Sioux Falls area, mostly loader manufacturers such as BSI-Door Hardware, Graco Inc. and Daktronics.

The plant Achieve workers visited Tuesday makes packaging for Wells Dairy Blue Bunny Ice Cream, GE light bulbs and Barilla Pasta, according to Ben Arndt, vice president of operations at Bell. Bell also makes packaging for McDonald's, DHL, UPS and the U.S. Postal Service.

Achieve employs about 90 people with disabilities at its pallet- and crate-making workshops and 28 people who are either support staff or production workers themselves.