

## **Career Builders**

By Mary-Alane Wiltse

### **A New Day at Serta Greene**

In the first column I wrote for this paper I made a remark about the incredibly long collective memory of those of us who are born and raised here. In recent conversations I have had with the managers from the Serta factory, located in Coxsackie, I believe this exact phenomenon is having an impact on this company's current employee recruitment efforts. Serta also seems to be affected by another small town characteristic – the famous rumor/gossip mill.

At the Career Center we have heard some negative comments from job seekers about Serta. Many people have complained that after they applied for a job at the company they never heard back about their application. Other people have said that they don't want to work at Serta because there is way too much overtime. These negative impressions of Serta's Greene Plant have spread throughout our community.

According to Chris Sweeney, the company's local Controller, the manufacturing facility has made changes. People's job applications are now always being acknowledged by the Human Resource's department. The belief that the company is non-responsive to job applicants was born when Serta first moved to the area and received over 800 applications for 80 initial openings. At that time, they just didn't have the staff to handle the large volume of applicants. For a short while the factory did require their employees to work extremely long days, however that practice has since been discontinued. Now, the targeted work week does not exceed 45 hours. Over the next few months the company is looking to hire an additional 60 workers in manufacturing related jobs, and wants to hear from interested residents. According to the current factory management and the two other employees I spoke with, the company is doing all it can to be an employee friendly workplace. In fact, for anyone wanting to work in a manufacturing environment, Serta can be a great opportunity.

The company's compensation structure is incentive based, which means that it rewards individual performance. The base hourly wage ranges from \$10.75 to \$12.50 per hour. Additionally, employees have the opportunity to earn "bonus hours", based on their individual efficiency rating. That rating is calculated based on the number of pieces that are produced and the length of time it takes to produce them. These bonus hours are paid at the employee's hourly rate and are paid in addition to the actual hours worked. The current average wage at Serta Greene is \$15.80 per hour. During 2006 more than 10% of their hourly workforce earned in excess of \$50,000. Employees are also provided with a generous fringe benefit package that includes medical and dental insurance, a 401K plan and paid vacation.

Bridget Beatty, from the Cairo area, has been working at Serta for over two years. She works in the sewing room as a "capper". On average, she works at a 160% efficiency level, which means she is making \$18.00 per hour. Bridget has more than doubled her income from her previous jobs in the human services field. When I asked her what traits make her good at her job, Bridget stated that it is her ability to stay focused. "You need to be accurate, but you also need to be fast. You need to be able to hang in there both physically and mentally during the whole day", she said.

Mike Pisano, who lives in Rotterdam, started working at Serta in January 2006. Prior to that Mike had worked at an Albany based mattress factory for twelve years. He

chose to come to Serta for the additional opportunities it offers. He is now working as a Mattress Lead, which has given him the chance to develop supervisory skills. Mike is excited to be involved in helping Serta grow to its full potential. He said, "I would love to have more people come and work here. We want people who enjoy working hard and like a team environment. You can make a ton of money here."

Working in a manufacturing environment, like Serta, does require physical ability, like arm-hand steadiness and other manual dexterity skills. You also need the ability to visualize how something will look after it is moved around or when its parts are sewn or put together. For some of the jobs you may also be required to move and carry king-size mattresses, which means you must be fairly strong. Finally, you need the ability to identify when something is wrong, or is likely to go wrong, so that it can be fixed before time and materials are lost.

Serta Greene expects a commitment from its employees. Everyone must pass a drug screening before they are hired. They must also follow a reasonable, but strict attendance policy. The benefits of these conditions are obvious. The people that work there know that they can count on their co-workers.

Although the national trend is for many manufacturing jobs to go overseas, mattresses are one of those products that will always be built in America simply because the shipping costs are too expensive to make importing feasible. The income possibilities and working environment offered by Serta Greene is an opportunity that local job seekers should not overlook.

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