

W.J. Cowee, LLC Establishes Scholarship Award to Encourage Industrial Manufacturing Careers

Katelyn Naske of Grafton, NY is First Recipient

BERLIN, NEW YORK, April 12, 2005 – Brian E. Suslak, President & CEO of W.J. Cowee, LLC, recently announced the establishment of the W.J. Cowee Scholarship Award. The first annual award will be formally presented this June to Katelyn Naske of Grafton, New York

The scholarship will be awarded annually to a Rensselaer County high school student who demonstrates outstanding aptitude for industrial engineering. The inspiration for the award is Willis Judson Cowee, the founder of W. J. Cowee, who invented machines over 100 years ago that enabled the mass production of wooden picks with wire attachments for the floral industry. The product eventually became known as the “Cowee pick,” an indispensable tool for professional florists. Today, W.J. Cowee, LLC is the world’s leading manufacturer of wooden floral picks, producing more than a quarter of a billion every year for domestic and international distribution.

“One of our corporate philosophies is to foster and encourage the talent of young people in our local community to pursue professional careers in industrial engineering and manufacturing.” said Suslak. “As a nation we need to help create a new generation of young people interested in applying their talents in math, science, ingenuity and leadership so they enter careers in manufacturing. This will help preserve our country’s leadership position as a manufacturing powerhouse in a global economy.”

Katelyn Naske, who will receive the scholarship award for 2005, attends Berlin Central High School in Berlin, New York, the same town where W. J Cowee is headquartered. Kate, who is in her senior year, currently participates in the New Visions Math, Engineering, Technology and Science program for talented high school students at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) in Troy, New York. As a part of that program, Kate entered and won third place in the Society of Manufacturing Engineers’ Automation Report and Presentation Contest. Her prize-winning entry detailed the manufacturing processes, tools and machines used in the manufacturing of the W.J. Cowee’s wooden floral picks, from start to finish.

“We were thrilled to see Kate’s outstanding presentation of our company’s manufacturing process, and proud for her that she won such a prestigious award. But what was really exciting for us at W.J. Cowee was having a local student come in and study what we do and how we do it,” Suslak said. He added, “The experience has motivated us to develop additional ways to work with our local students and encourage them to get involved in understanding scientific and mathematical principles as they apply to industrial manufacturing.”

W. J. Cowee's executives plan to work with various members of the academic community to develop a multi-disciplinary, case study program that will enable high school students to apply their knowledge in the classroom to real-world situations at the company. "It is our long term objective to increase the size of our scholarship as our company grows. Hopefully, our program will eventually develop into a working model so that other companies in various communities may also desire to work with their local schools to help develop careers in manufacturing for young people in the United States," said Suslak.

School Superintendent Toni Diamond shares Suslak's enthusiasm for the collaborative project. "The Cowee Award Project provides our secondary students with an exciting opportunity to transfer and apply knowledge learned in the classroom to an authentic industrial engineering/manufacturing situation," said Diamond. "This unique program allows us to join forces with a well-respected community business as well as members of higher education to create a course of study that is rigorous and relevant for our students. The traditional walls of classrooms are gone. Instead, school leaders and the business leaders at W.J Cowee share a clear and compelling vision of what we hope to provide for our students. The Cowee Award Project allows us to mobilize resources and combine them in ways that challenge and broaden our students' learning and strengthen their success." Diamond also praised Naske, whose project on the Cowee manufacturing process was the catalyst that inspired W.J. Cowee, LLC to develop the Cowee program for students. "We are so proud of Kate," said Diamond. "

Katelyn, who says she has "always loved science," attributes much of her success to her teachers over the years. "I've always had great science teachers," said Kate, "and science has always been my favorite subject." During middle school, Katelyn was selected to attend the Horizons summer program at Clarkson University, an intensive one-week program designed for girls in math, science and engineering. Kate, who hopes to become a physician, will be attending RPI in the fall and plans to major in biomedical engineering. As for wooden floral picks, Katelyn noted that it was "mind boggling to realize how complicated the manufacturing process is" for a tiny little wooden pick. "There's a lot that goes into it," she said.