

## MSI SIGN & SHOE SHOP A WAYFINDING FOR WORKERS

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By definition “Wayfinding” encompasses the utilization of several different types of signs that point the way to various locations. These signs can be simple or complex, and usually appear at junctions or along a route to lead the way to a specific place. This article will show how Michigan State Industries’ (MSI) sign and shoe operation provides a wayfinding experience for incarcerated individuals working in the shop.

MSI Sign Shop Manager, Chuck Beltz, and Industries Production Leader, Wayne Devenbaugh, along with production supervisors oversee the Sign & Shoe Shops’ day-to-day operations for over 25 incarcerated individuals. Our shops work as a team to sustain an environment of inspiration, reinforcement, validation, and intuitive creativity.

The MSI Sign & Shoe Operation offers soft skills and technical knowledge needed to succeed in the work force and the opportunity to utilize those tools to be productive, self-sufficient citizens upon release. Workers understand upon hire the coveted role they play in every aspect of the operations. Both operations are housed within the same building, and work centers are strategically designed on the shop floor to create a seamless flow between both factories. Managing and planning daily production is no small task, and each worker must be fully equipped with soft and hard skills to perform their duties in an efficient manner.

It is important that the worker selection process puts the right person on the right job, and choosing individuals who have a basic set of knowledge, skills and abilities along with a fit between what the incarcerated individual

**MSI Shoe Shop worker using a heat press machine to mold uppers and soles together**





**MSI Sign Shop worker using a CAD Software program for preparing sign blanks**

can and wants to do. This task at times can be difficult because it is not always possible to tell exactly what each worker's abilities might be and if they are the most suitable candidate for the role they might play in the shop.

Similar to other industries programs, the shop relies on classification staff and a process where incarcerated individuals are recruited through a selection pool. Incarcerated individuals may or may not have gone through other programming prior to the work assignment, so it is important for counselors and reentry staff to screen for the best possible pool of workers. In general correctional programming focuses on changing the incarcerated individuals thought processes utilizing cognitive restructuring and behavioral techniques. Incarcerated individuals are considered for programming based on their assessed risk and need level and are prioritized by their earliest release date (ERD).

Once selected for a work assignment in the Sign & Shoe operation, workers are set on a path to success through a combination of soft skills and technical training that is inherent to the duties they perform. The shop culture is on display daily with motivational banners that hang from the ceiling to remind them of the importance of teamwork, and respect for others.

Along the way, camaraderie develops with mutual trust among workers that spend a lot of time together on assignments and reaching production goals. Each individual contribution to the success of a project can be seen by their willingness to learn, a positive work ethic, reliability, honesty, adaptability, personal integrity,

dependability amongst other positive traits that contribute to the success of both shops.

A program and work assignment evaluation form is used to further determine progress and improvements over a specific period and note if various soft skills have been met. We evaluate incarcerated individuals on their punctuality, attendance, ability to listen, self-direction, job completion, attendance, ability to follow rules, communication with others, personal appearance, cooperation, etc..

The shoe operation provides footwear for over 38,000 incarcerated individuals statewide. It takes approximately 24 days for the shop to produce a run of shoes. Wayne Devenbaugh, the shop leader for the shoe operation created a real-time monitor display using a combination of software programs to track daily production. Workers can view their assigned work-center to determine sizes and quantities to be produced for the day. This shop floor tool is very helpful for workers and allows for quick

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MSI Sign Shop worker using a Vector Graphics Editor design software program for signage layouts

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adjustments to future scheduling based on demands for various sizes and styles of shoes. This tool has eliminated the amount of paperwork helping us move towards a digital filing, display and presentation systems.

Wayne also achieved a major accomplishment as the team lead in the development and training of MSI staff for the new enterprise resource planning (ERP) implementation which was rolled out to all MSI factory operations in November 2019. His knowledge will be an asset in the coming months as the shop implements the second phase of the ERP project, known as factory automation. The process will provide workers with hands-on use of automated devices to perform tasks in their daily work functions including shop floor workstations, bar code scanners, label printer's and mini PC's. His commitment to excellence has also been recognized on the national level as a 2020 NCIA Honor Roll Award Recipient.

The MSI Sign Operation provides opportunities for workers to learn technical skills and gain valuable knowledge through hands on training using various graphic design software applications and screen printing processes. The shop produces a wide range of products, such as: banners, retractable tradeshow displays, road signage, decals, indoor and outdoor building signage, refurbished signage, window graphics and much more. Skills acquired through the production and manufacture of signage products are transferable to the workplace and fall within the standard occupational codes for graphic art design, plasma cutting operations, screen printing, and mill machine operations.

In 2019, the Sign Shop manufactured 80,000 new signs, 36,000 refurbished signs, 35,000 decals, 300 wooden state seal plaques, 250 banners along with a plethora of other custom specialty signage products. We require workers to be trained and equipped to handle daily project scheduling, custom graphics design, print production, fabrication, quality control, inspection, and finishing. Incarcerated individuals work to make signs to help others find their way, they also in the meantime find their own.

The graphics design team have the freedom to use creative thinking on design concepts and take pride in producing a high-quality product. Workers in both operations, signs and graphics, work together as a team to ensure every project meets or exceeds our customers' expectations. MSI Sign Shop Manager, Chuck Beltz, will be retiring after 32 years of dedicated service to the MSI Sign & Shoe Operation and the MSI Organization. His commitment to incarcerated individual success has created a strong foundation for his staff and workers to follow.