Far From a Forest, But Part of Forestry

By Crystal Krapfl

While working for a large company may not be common for students who graduate with a Forestry degree, it is a reality for some. Even large companies need forest products experts as Forestry student Tyler Betcher found out. Tyler, a senior in the Sustainable Materials Science and Technology option, was a Materials Engineer Intern for Kimball International, a large furniture and electronic manufacturing company in Jasper, Indiana.

Tyler greatly enjoyed the variety of tasks he got to perform. Tyler commented, “It was not the same thing day in and day out and I really appreciated the variety.” He would receive requests from clients for certain quality control tests, carry out additional tests according to ASTM (American Society for Testing and Materials) protocol, create test methods that other furniture companies do not use, test out certain furniture materials, and write reports that were sent to clients. All of these different assignments allowed Tyler to be exposed to many different individuals, materials and projects.

In addition to becoming more familiar with different testing methods, Tyler also learned a lot about the furniture business and how it relates to Forestry. His boss had a master’s degree in wood science and was very knowledgeable and often passed on his knowledge to Tyler. This internship made Tyler realize that what he was getting a degree in had many possibilities, some he did not realize before his intern experience.

Tyler also gained job-related skills that will help him no matter what his future endeavors are. He immensely gained communication skills. He worked with a wide variety of clients. He had to use his communication skills to dissect what he knew and found out about the materials and then relate it to clients in a way they could understand.

Tyler accredits some of his success to knowledge he previously obtained in his NREM classes. Prior to the internship, he gained wood anatomy knowledge, learned about the wood drying processes and became familiar with ASTM standards, all of which were useful in being a Materials Engineer Intern.

In the end, Kimball International offered Tyler a full-time position for the company, which will be an option after graduation. Tyler went on to say, “This job really allowed me to put myself out there, network, make connections and it looks good on a resume. The company treated me very well.”

Tyler may never have seen himself working for a furniture company, but he decided to go for it and the experience really worked out for him. He offered these words of advice for students looking for an internship, “Sell yourself and talk confidently about your past experiences and what you are good at.” If you follow that advice, you may just end up with a positive intern experience like Tyler.