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Women’s Empowerment Theme of UM Manufacturing Conference

Daylong event encourages women already in or considering STEM careers

APRIL 4, 2022 BY EDWIN B. SMITH



Courtney Taylor (left), deputy director for strategy and programs with Accelerate Mississippi, moderates the ‘What I Wish I Knew’ panel discussion that included (from left) Emily Lauder, vice president of Toyota Manufacturing Mississippi; Frankie Adaire, operations manager at Raytheon; and Transito James, director of operations at Milwaukee Tool. Photo by Thomas Graning/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

OXFORD, Miss. – As Women’s History Month came to an end, female **University of Mississippi** students in STEM fields were strongly encouraged to empower themselves in the male-dominated manufacturing industry during a daylong conference.

More than 150 participants met Thursday (March 31) at The Inn at Ole Miss for “**Step Forward: Advancing Women in Manufacturing**,” hosted by the **Haley Barbour Center for Manufacturing Excellence** and the **Manufacturing Institute**. MI is the education and workforce partner of the National Association of Manufacturers.

“The conference accomplished everything we had hoped it would,” said Scott Kilpatrick, CME interim director. “Students took advantage of the opportunity to meet and learn from successful female leaders in the manufacturing industry.”

“The speakers represented an array of women in various stages of their careers, from rising achievers to seasoned veterans.”

Leslie Petrie, vice president of global environment, health and safety for International Paper, delivered the keynote address, encouraging attendees to be flexible and open to change.

“Don’t be afraid of different experiences as you chart your career path,” Petrie said. “Embrace change! Life begins outside of our comfort zones, so expose yourself to new people and places.”

Petrie also encouraged the predominantly female audience to be good stewards of their talents by asking lots of questions and being observant.

“That’s how I made my journey from being a good math student in a small town in Wisconsin to my current top management position in Memphis,” she said.

Three CME alumnae returned to campus to share their career paths in a mid-morning panel discussion. Joanna Harelson, professor of practice in the UM Department of Chemical Engineering, moderated the question-and-answer session that included Harleigh Huggins, planning and development manager for AkzoNobel; Lauren Kiel, business analyst for McKinsey & Co.; and Elizabeth Taylor, quality engineer manager for Toyota Motor Manufacturing.

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Campus Briefs

Students Learn ‘Real Politics’ in Washington, D.C., Winter Session

OXFORD, Miss. – Eleven University of Mississippi students spent their winter break learning about the people who work behind the scenes of the American government in Washington, D.C. Lead by Jonathan Klingler, assistant professor of political science, the students of Pol 391: Applied Politics met not with candidates, but with the people who make candidates’

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Young Alumna Gives Back to School of Accountancy

OXFORD, Miss. – Stephanie Jennings Teague, of Chicago, sees her commitment of \$100,000 to the Patterson School of Accountancy’s new building at the University of Mississippi as a means of saying “thank you.” “It is a way to show a small token of my appreciation to Ole Miss, the faculty and staff, and the accounting

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Ole Miss In the News

Reuters: Keep an Eye on the Money Supply

U.S. inflation roller coaster prompts fresh look at long-ignored money supply By Michael S. Derby NEW YORK – The amount of money sloshing around the U.S. economy shrank last year for the first time on record, a development that some economists believe bolsters the case for U.S. inflation pressures continuing to abate. The Federal Reserve’s

Issues the panelists addressed included finding your career path, meeting and overcoming challenges, strategies for career advancement, finding and becoming role models, and striking a balance between personal and professional goals.

Encouraging networking and interaction, Al Jorgenson, vice president of strategic engagement and inclusion for the MI, divided the audience into three groups for a “Reciprocity Ring” session.

During the 90-minute exercise, individuals shared both personal and professional requests with other members within their group. By the session’s conclusion, all participants had opportunities to receive help from one another.

Following lunch, two professionals shared their toughest challenges and how they were able to tackle obstacles head-on. Presenters for the TED Talk-formatted segment were Swee Har Wilcox, director of human resources for Ceko Door/ASSA ABLOY; and Alyssa Van Delden, melt shop supervisor for Nucor Steel Kankakee, Inc.

“The most important lessons I learned after the plant I was managing closed were (to) build relationships, put people first, take care of business, focus on your mission, think outside the box and celebrate everything,” Wilcox said.

Van Delden, who said her goal is to become the first female melt shop manager in her company’s history, encouraged the women to persevere in their career goals.

“I’m not afraid to make mistakes along the way,” she said. “There will be difficulties along the way to reaching your goals, but keep working at it. It will get easier.”

Several successful executives shared tips and secrets for success in “What I Wish I Knew,” moderated by Courtney Taylor, deputy director for strategy and programs with Accelerate Mississippi. Panelists were Emily Lauder, vice president of Toyota Manufacturing Mississippi; Frankie Adaire, operations manager at Raytheon; and Transito James, director of operations at Milwaukee Tool.

“It’s so important to listen, learn and then launch,” Lauder said. “Don’t be so quick to make changes before you understand how things work.”

Women in leadership roles must learn to accept feedback and delegate responsibility, Adair said. “No one expects you to know everything or to do it all by yourself,” she said.

James echoed Adair’s observation.

“Always be sensitive to the micro-messaging that goes on within their company,” James said. “Knowing the thoughts of the people you supervise can make or break your success as their manager.

“Be aware of subtle dissatisfactions that, unaddressed, could grow into major problems later.”

Closing workshops addressed recruiting a personal board of director and building your own brand.

For more information about STEP Forward, contact STEPahead@nam.org.

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