

In Search of 'Talent and Motivation,' Factory and Moravian College Cement Partnership

By Nicole Radzевич Mertz on March 2, 2021

BETHLEHEM - The Factory in Bethlehem partners with young food, beverage and pet health businesses and helps them grow.

As former Freshpet CEO, Richard Thompson believes among the key ingredients in business are "talent and motivation."

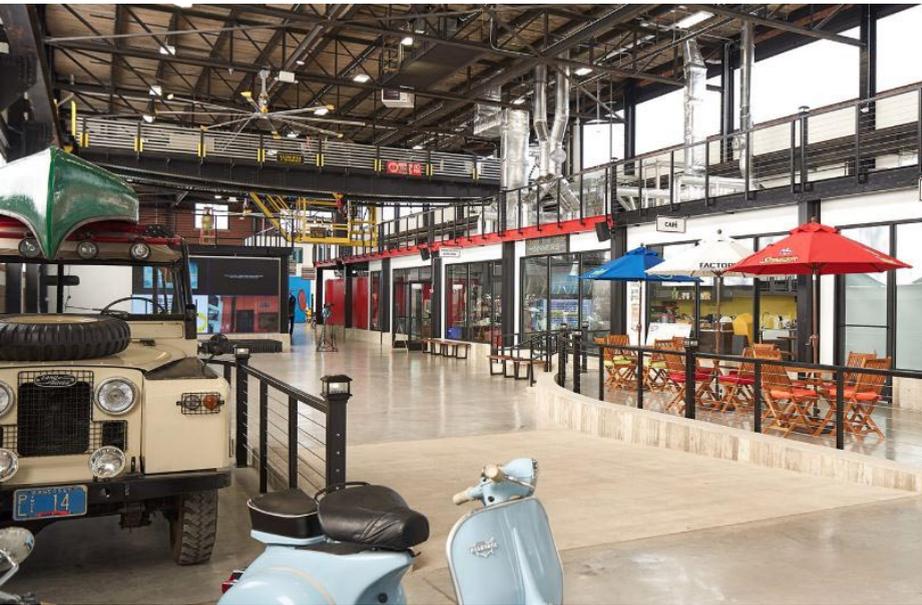
Both played heavily into his decision to stay in Lehigh Valley, where nearly 52,000 students are enrolled, to launch his current business venture: Factory LLC.

It's an investment company that partners with growing food, beverage and pet health businesses. Those up and comers have become mentors to aspiring engineers, supply chain analysts, marketers and other students, creating a rich supply of talent in Factory's backyard.

In the two years it's been opened, Factory has hosted more than 50 student internships at its south Bethlehem facility and collaborated with local institutions, most recently formalizing a partnership with Moravian College.

The new partnership offers Factory employees with tuition discounts at Moravian and Moravian students co-operative learning opportunities at Factory, blurring the line between classroom and workplace.

"We believe the talent and motivation of young people will drive future growth and appeal to our partner entrepreneurs and brand managers," Thompson said.



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Such corporate-college partnerships have become a vital part of higher education as students graduate with not only the knowledge but practical experience. Moravian has also partnered with BSI Corporate Benefits, Good Shepherd Rehabilitation Network and CX University.

Factory works with students from other institutions such as Northampton Community College, Lafayette College, Lehigh University and Penn State. Factory and Penn State Lehigh Valley Launchbox present the annual Startup Lehigh Valley, a quick-pitch competition for local entrepreneurs.

Some of the Valley's 11 institutions of higher education have developed training programs for specific employers, and others are looking for ways to enrich their existing internship programs. Over the last two years, 150 people have attended Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation's annual Internship Summit which provides businesses and colleges a place to learn about each other's needs and build relationships.

"What we heard from our community was an increasing interest from employers to connect in meaningful ways with their future talent while colleges and universities sought to

grow and deepen employer relations and students needed to gain real-world experiences in the workplace. Internships are a tried-and-true vehicle to meet these needs. For an internship program to be successful for all involved, the work accomplished by interns must meet the employer's needs and support the student's growth," said Karianne Gelinias, LVEDC Vice President of Business Attraction and Talent Supply. "Lehigh Valley's institutions and corporate partners have built and continue to expand meaningful programs, creating a robust pipeline of talent that will benefit employers in the long run."

While there are rich opportunities throughout the Lehigh Valley, Thompson knows Factory has a certain cool factor. Inside a converted Bethlehem Steel mill in the shadow of the rusting blast furnaces, the 40,000 square-foot laboratory offers services such as food safety, product development, supply chain expertise and social media marketing – all wrapped in a bit of whimsy. The workspaces wend around a common area where team members can chat over lunch at tables topped with umbrellas, climb a rock wall or ride an electric scooter.

Caitlin O'Hanley, a 2019 Moravian graduate who interned at Factory, said it feels a bit like Google.

"The place is full of entrepreneurs, which is a really cool experience because they are a similar age, but they are doing such big things," said O'Hanley, who worked on marketing projects. "They have this go-getter attitude. I learned so much."

Those entrepreneurs have been recruited from across the country because of their innovation and ability "to scale up." Factory provides a team of experienced operators with \$250 million of investable capital who acquire meaningful equity stakes in client companies and help them grow.

Factory hosts seven brands. Among the success stories is Stuffed Puffs, a confectionary maker that came up with the novel idea (and manufacturing process) of stuffing chocolate inside marshmallows. Stuffed Puffs is moving into a 150,000-square-foot manufacturing plant in Hanover Township, Northampton County.

Frank Alvarado, LVEDC Talent Supply Manager, contributed to this story.

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