‘It’s providing for my kids’: JTM Foods’ Wichita Location Creates New Avenues for Success

By Emily Younger Barnwell

Meet Dearius Presley, a versatile individual and father of six, known for tackling any task at hand.

Presley, while not a newcomer to Wichita, recently joined the ranks of JTM Foods located at ICT21 Industrial Park at Interstate I-135 and 21st Street North.

“I found the job on Indeed. I had never worked at a bakery before. I wanted to try something different,” Presley explained.

The location of JTM Foods played a pivotal role in Presley’s decision to apply. Positioned in Wichita’s north end, it is one of the only food manufacturing facilities in the area.

“It’s close to where I live, only about five blocks away from home. I walk to work,” Presley said.

Before starting his sanitation role at JTM Foods in September, the 32-year-old worked at a shipping company across town. Without personal transportation, Presley relied on car-sharing services or rides from friends to get to and from work.

"It will help a lot of people out. I mean, a lot of people have problems finding jobs and getting to their jobs when they do find them. This being right here can help them out. They can be like me and walk," he expressed.

JTM Foods, headquartered in Erie, Pennsylvania, was the first company to secure space at the ICT21 Industrial Park in 2022 before launching production in September 2023. The CEO, Monty Pooley, attributed the company's choice to the strong collaboration between the city's public and private sectors, the accessible location and the area's exceptional workforce.

"We've got opportunities for several levels of folks within the organization," mentioned Pooley during the facility's grand opening. "We've got first-level work for individuals who have never worked in the manufacturing facility before, and then what that offers up is an opportunity for those who want to get into supervisor roles, get into shift management. We've got maintenance positions that are much more technical. We've got logistics. We have shipping opportunities, and then we also have marketing, and we'll have some HR opportunities here in Wichita as well."

Naomi Hightower, who joined JTM Foods in July as a HR generalist, shared her motivation: "I wanted to be a part of a company that cared about their employees and their community."

In just a few months, Hightower witnessed the positive impact the new business had on the surrounding area, especially in terms of employment for individuals living nearby.

"This gives the people in north Wichita the opportunity to invest in not just themselves, but their household, their kids, and it's a worthy investment. They deserve it," she emphasized.

Presley echoed that sentiment, saying, "It's providing for my kids. I work for them. It's not for me."

"I think this is the beginning. In the next couple of years, when JTM Foods is fully operational, I think we will see the

company's vision for Wichita come to life," Hightower added.

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