

# Putting Their Artistic Skills to Use:

## Georgia High School Students Learn a Craft—and Make Money at the Same Time

by JAY S. POLACHEK, *Director of Communications*

Think back to the job—or jobs—you had during high school. Many of you bagged groceries, flipped burgers, pumped gas or worked in the family business. Some of you may have even ventured out and started your own lawn mowing business. But, let me ask you this: As a high school junior or senior, did you ever think of working as a dental technician? Students in White County, Georgia are.



Georgia state Senator Guy Middleton learns a little bit about the dental laboratory industry from apprenticeship program graduate Jason Grooms and current apprentice, Ian Lipscomb.



Apprenticeship program coordinator Allison Westmoreland is shown around the laboratory by Grooms.

In 1994, Bill Marshall, vocational supervisor for the White County School District, applied for state funding to start an apprenticeship program in the local high school. In Marshall's words, "The ideal program would give classroom training that would be directly related to a certain profession. What we taught these students in the classroom, they would take and apply in a job situation." That year, Marshall's grant application was turned down, but he started the program anyway. "That first year, we had 20 to 25 students participate in the program," he said.

Jason Grooms was one of those first 25 students in the program. During his senior year of high school, he was working at a local grocery store as a bagger, and "I helped the butcher out on the weekends. The more I was back there, the more my boss wanted me to learn," he said. So, he looked into joining the apprenticeship program. "When I first went into the program, I wanted to be a meat cutter. Then, one day, my art teacher approached me and told me about an opportunity to put my art skills to use—working in a dental laboratory. ...I lucked out. It excited me to learn that I could use my artistic skills in my job," he said.

One thing led to another, and an interview was set up between Grooms and Bill Thomas, CDT, who owns Bill Thomas & Associates Dental Laboratory in Cleveland, GA.

"I met with Bill, looked around the laboratory, and then waited for that phone call," Grooms said. "It was just like going out and looking for a real job." He said that he found out he had gotten the job from the school, and started a few days later.

"Tracy (Bill's daughter and a technician in the laboratory) was pregnant, and they needed someone to take her place in the model department while she was out on maternity leave," he said. Tracy trained Grooms, "and I got the basic skills down. ...She went out on leave, and all this work came in. ...and I had to get it done. ...I was really slow in the beginning, but I got the work done. ...The work was functional, but I worked outrageous hours," he said.