



Grooms is the teacher...



...and Lipscomb is the student.

Grooms said the pressure to get his work done was tough, but he handled it head-on. "I dove right in. I was in charge of the department, and I believe that pressure and responsibility helped me learn a lot," he said. On top of all this responsibility, Grooms had to deal with pressures of any 18 year old—homework, a girl he was planning to marry and raise a family with and helping out on the family farm. "It was pretty tough in the beginning, but everyone in the laboratory really pitched in and helped me out," he said. "I still did my homework and went out on the weekends, but I had to sacrifice a lot because I knew I was getting married and had a lot of future commitments."

Even though Grooms was young and inexperienced, he says everyone at the laboratory gave him a helping hand. "Everyone at the lab made sure I wasn't held back in my learning. The education was made available to me, and I was able to learn pretty quickly. ...Bill saw the effort I was putting out—the desire I had to learn—and he made the commitment to put as much as he could back into me," he said.

Today, Grooms is into his third year of full-time work at Thomas' laboratory. He is the department head of the model department. In addition, he just recently wrote the job description, interviewed and hired the laboratory's second apprentice—White County High School senior Ian Lipscomb. Lipscomb is working under Grooms, learning the industry as he goes. Grooms said that from the very first day, he has treated Lipscomb like he was treated three years ago. "The first day he was here, we gave him a list of vocabulary terms to learn. We want him to talk to us about the work he's doing in the correct terms, so we can all work better and faster," he said.

Lipscomb, who has only been working in the laboratory for about a month, enjoys his work. "My father was a friend of Bill's," Lipscomb said. "He said he needed some help in his lab, and it sounded interesting to me. I had never been around this kind of work before, but I enjoy it so far. ...I've learned an awful lot so far, and what I learned in my Health Occupations class at school has helped me out a lot."

Grooms thinks Lipscomb already shows promise. "I think he (Lipscomb) is capable of learning all that he wants to," he said.

A year after the apprenticeship program was founded, Allyson Westmoreland, the current program coordinator, was hired. Also that year, the program received state funding—to the tune of \$75,000. "The state people knew who I was," Marshall said. "I had attended all of their meetings and participated in their programs. The second time we applied for the grant, they were much more receptive to the application."

The apprenticeship program offers high school juniors and seniors the opportunity to experience a career before graduating from school. Westmoreland says that most of the students that participate in the program are "students that aren't headed to college—and want something more in their future than flipping burgers or working in a grocery store." The apprenticeships range from banking to health care, journalism to dental technology. "The apprenticeship program offers higher skilled jobs to these students, not entry level jobs. Basically, they are career sustaining positions," said Marshall.

According to Westmoreland, students in the apprenticeship program can stay involved through the completion of their post-secondary education. About half of the students end up going on to technical college to pursue degrees in their field. In order to be considered a "completer", Westmoreland said that the student must complete 144 hours of high school classes related to their job interest, 2,000 hours of on the job training, and earn a certificate or degree from a technical school, community college or college. If, along the way, however, a student doesn't complete a part of the program, Westmoreland issues that student a certificate recognizing them for what they did accomplish. "I believe in giving them credit for what they have done, not penalizing them for deciding this career isn't for them," she said. Westmoreland says the completion rate among students in White County is close to 80 percent.

The apprenticeship program has been a tremendous success, but Westmoreland emphasizes that it isn't for every student. Students interested in the program are qualified before they are considered for job placement, and certain requirements must be met. Students in the program must maintain a grade point average of 70, get three teacher recommendations—one coming from a teacher in the field they're interested in pursuing, be on-