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**Gadsden County BOCC Tours Coastal Lumber**

**Havana, FL-** In honor of Working Forest Week, Coastal Lumber Company hosted a tour of their operations for the Gadsden County BOCC with a small delegation of state officials and local tree farmers. Coastal Lumber Company, which began operation in February of 1981, continues to be a major employer of the county of currently 350 employees.

Working Forest Week is promoted through the Florida Forestry Association every third week of October. It encourages those in the forest industry to celebrate the week by telling the forestry story and sharing how the forest impacts our lives, livelihood and the economy. The host and tour guide, David Norman who is the Procurement Manager for Coastal Lumber, walked the delegation through a maze of hot and dusty levels in the process of making plywood.

One of the most fascinating aspects that seemed to catch the attention of the delegation was the process of the lumber being fed into the peeler. The peeler removes the veneer from the lumber and then cuts a continuous layer of wood into long sheets that are used to make plywood. Once the process is finished, what's left of the lumber is a wooden fence post that is sent off to another part of the plant to be treated and later sold.

The tour provided an in depth look at how they make plywood which is supplied to most of the southeastern region of the United States. Heat, steam, and sawdust permeated the air as the employees moved massive amounts of wood throughout the plant. Commissioner Brenda Holt, Commissioner Eric Hinson and County Administrator Robert M. Presnell were among those who toured the plant.

“Two of my brothers were previously employed by Coastal Lumber Company. It is one of the largest economic engines that drives our local economy and to see that up close and personal was remarkable. It was very interesting to see the technology and machinery that goes into this operation of this size. The employees appeared to be very happy and engaged in their work and I was excited to see skilled employment opportunities in Gadsden County”, stated Commissioner Holt.

Commissioner Hinson stated, “I have a new appreciation for how hard these people work to provide the material necessary for us to build houses, schools and new businesses. The fact that an operation and industry within my district can create 350 plus jobs on many different levels from the logger to the salesperson is just amazing. I am glad they have chosen Gadsden County and we want to do everything we can to show them that we appreciate their presence in our county.”

The tour of the plant ended with a photo opportunity of the delegation standing in front of stacks of finished plywood product. Massive machinery, steam and sawdust continued in this 24 hour 7 days a week operation to produce more plywood as semi-trucks were loaded to transport the plywood to the market. Industry like this reminds us of what we hardly see anymore, “Made in the U.S.A.”

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**Picture Caption:** Delegation of farmers, state and local government officials tour Coastal Lumber in celebration of Working Forests Week.