

ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Date: July 31, 2016

Section: Business

Good chemistry at L'Oreal Maybelline

Author(s): Stephanie Lamm

Before Christa Rowland enters the manufacturing floor at the L'Oreal Maybelline plant in North Little Rock, she puts on a lab coat, a hairnet, a reflective vest and lip gloss.

"This is NYX. It's made by L'Oreal, but not using the process I created," Rowland said as she applied lip gloss using a L'Oreal-brand compact mirror.

Behind her, there's a shadowbox of the first product she helped create, Voluminous Butterfly Mascara.

Rowland leads the process expertise team at the North Little Rock L'Oreal Maybelline plant. She's in charge of developing the processes used in formulating pressed powders, liquid lip color, mascara, eyeliners and other cosmetics.

Last year, her team won L'Oreal's Beauty Shaker award for streamlining the process used to make lip glosses. L'Oreal brand ambassador Eva Longoria helped present the \$20,000 prize to Rowland and her team in New York. Rowland got a selfie with the actress.

"Two weeks later I went back to New York to see a friend and I saw [Longoria] in H&M and I wanted to be like 'Do you remember me?'" Rowland said. "I have this theory now that she has some sort of cosmic significance in my life."

The Little Rock plant has won a Beauty Shaker award five out of six years running.

In the packaging area of the plant, metallic purple tubes shoot through an assembly line behind her, each getting filled with a black mixture that Rowland helped create.

"If you have a mascara in your purse, there's a six out of 10 chance that the process was designed in this office and that it was made in this plant," Rowland said.

The 785,000-square-foot plant has been in North Little Rock for 41 years. It is one of five L'Oreal plants in North America.

The factory employs more than 400 full-time workers and 100 temporary workers. Eric Fox, the plant manager, has said it has a financial impact of \$30 million annually on the local economy.

Rowland moves efficiently through the factory floor, but never misses a chance to say hello to her co-workers. Employees in every section of the plant, from packaging and manufacturing to product design, know her by name.

With money from Rowland's team's Beauty Shaker award, L'Oreal created a space at the plant for employees to get together and discuss new project ideas. The indoor-outdoor space, which Rowland helped design, has a coffee table, benches with colorful pillows, lounge chairs and a faux-grass rug.

"We wanted a space where people could go to get away from their desk and get away from their usual frame of mind," Rowland said. "It's these kind of creative spaces where people can come up with creative ideas."

Rowland has worked at the plant since 2008. She didn't always want to be a cosmetic chemist. She initially planned to go into pharmacy.

"Looking back now, I think I'd be so bored in a pharmacy setting," she said.

She went to the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, where she received an undergraduate degree in chemistry and a master's degree in business administration.

"No doubt her UALR education prepared her to work on efficiency improvements, troubleshoot formula issues with products and create new processes to solve challenges," said Christian O'Neal, UALR's vice chancellor for university advancement.

When Rowland tells people she works at L'Oreal, not everyone expects her to be an award-winning chemist.

"I get every sort of response from 'oh, do you work at the makeup counter?' to 'oh, do you work on the packaging floor?' to 'oh, my grandma works there,'" she said.

Working at a cosmetics factory does come with unique perks, though. The factory boasts a company store, and employees get a stipend to spend.

"And yes, because everyone asks, we do get free products," Rowland said.

Sunday/Monday Business on 07/31/2016

Copyright 2016, Arkansas Democrat-Gazette.