

Michael Johnson  
Valmont Investments

In my junior year, I was presented with the opportunity to intern at Valmont Investments. It was a field that I had little experience in but interested me greatly. I accepted the offer to intern for Woody Koppel, a Sewanee alum, with great excitement.

Valmont Investments is a limited liability corporation in New Orleans. It focuses on the redevelopment and reuse of historical properties. They find creative and adaptive ways to turn blighted and abandoned properties into viable housing options while keeping the historical importance of the properties intact. This allows them to keep the importance of the buildings to the neighborhoods while also raising the value of the property.

Day-to-day tasks involved with renovation can be daunting for one person. For this reason, many of the smaller tasks required on a job site became my responsibility. Whether it was meeting contractors, ordering material, or trouble shooting a construction method, there was never a strict routine to my days. I was constantly required to put problem solving skills to good use in order to contribute to the project continuing to run smoothly, quickly, and efficiently.

Because Valmont retains some investments as rental property, I was also involved in the property management aspect of the business. I answered tenant phone calls, scheduled work orders, and hired appropriate specialists in order to address problems in the rental units. Early in the internship, I noticed a specific need. When a quick reference was needed regarding an appliance model and serial information it was a lengthy process that involved an unnecessary visit to the property. I created a property information spreadsheet in excel that could be accessed from their hard drive through any computer in the office. This way any employee that needed information for a repair was able to access this information quickly.

I was also able to rent vacant units, which required communication and salesmanship. I was responsible for every aspect, from marketing, to showing the unit, to answering questions, to drawing up and signing leases, to collecting rent. It was a process that demanded organization and precise attention to detail.

Throughout the process, I was able to understand the value of being a proactive and thoughtful employee. Often times it was my responsibility to complete tasks that could further improve our efficiency in completing projects. My value would have been nil if I was not able to assess areas that needed improvement and provide input on possible solutions. This attitude was important to practice so that I will be able to apply it to future employment after graduation.

My experience working for Valmont Investments was a very positive learning experience. The many tasks I was faced with each day forced my problem solving skills, communication and application of knowledge to improve vastly. It also showed me a career field that I find very interesting and will pursue after graduation.