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Expressions!
OF OKLAHOMA VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

TIP helps create 600 new jobs in Durant

Chalk up another success for the Oklahoma Vo-Tech system's Training for Industry Program (TIP). It's the prime reason why CustomerLinx, a customer contact and support firm, is establishing a new $1.5 million facility in Durant.

Todd Dale, CustomerLinx's project manager, said the facility is expected to eventually house 600 employees and have a $17 million positive impact on the local community.

The first 150 CustomerLinx employees, soon to be LinxReps™, are currently engaged in customer marketing and support training at Kiamichi Technology Center's Durant campus through the TIP program.

Dale said the proximity of Kiamichi Technology Center and the quality training it offers, as well as the local labor pool, were very attractive incentives. Jim Green, industrial coordinator at Kiamichi Technology Center's Durant Campus, who is overseeing the TIP agreement with CustomerLinx, said the technology center is providing all the support for the new firm. The new LinxReps are being trained on the school campus and instructors are designing a training curriculum.

Green said CustomerLinx has a broad spectrum of jobs ranging from customer marketing communications representatives (with starting pay of $8.50 an hour) to supervisors and general managers.

Dale said he is impressed with "the economic development incentives Oklahoma offers for new job creation through the TIP program. They are the best I've seen."

According to Dale, Kiamichi Technology Center and the Durant Chamber of Commerce have been great partners in the establishment of CustomerLinx's $1.5 million, 35,000 square foot facility. "It is the most state-of-the-art facility we have. In addition to offering customer care service and support by telephone, the LinxReps will also be able to support e-commerce Web sites through e-mail responses and interactive text chat," he said.

CustomerLinx opens a new $1.5 million facility in Durant to offer customer care service and support by telephone.

Each job created by CustomerLinx will generate an average of $550 per year in taxes and the average annual pay will be more than $22,000, explained Tommy Kramer, economic development director with the City of Durant. The jobs created by CustomerLinx will be a major boost to the city's finances, Kramer said.

For more information about CustomerLinx, call Kristine Gager at (202)326-1747 or e-mail kristine_gager@dc.edelman.com

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Need for 'technological literacy' increases student enrollment in technology education

Oklahoma students are becoming increasingly aware of their need to become technologically literate —a fact that is causing enrollment in Technology Education programs in middle schools and junior high schools to shoot skyward, state vo-tech officials have announced.

"Enrollment in our Technology Education programs has risen more than 333 percent in the last decade," said Dr. Ann Benson, director of the Oklahoma Department of Vocational-Technical Education, Stillwater. "In 1990, we had 7,000 students in 109 programs. This past school year, that had mushroomed to 30,500 students in 226 programs."

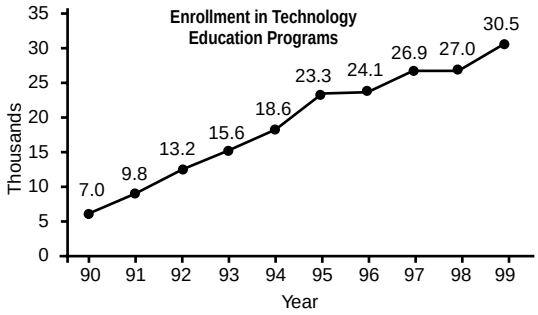
"This is evidence that students are becoming increasingly aware of the role technology will play in the nation's future," said Lynn Hawkins, technology education state program administrator.

Although programs are designed for students in the sixth through 10th grades, the bulk of enrollment comes from students in the seventh and eighth grades, Hawkins said.

"These are the grades we really target for enrollment because our programs help give students a sense of direction for their future careers," Hawkins said. "They can then take high school courses that better prepare them for the careers they are most interested in."

Hawkins said the emphasis in technology education programs is on career exploration.

"Our students have the opportunity to complete a series of learning activities in 20 different career areas," Hawkins said.



Among those areas are computer-aided drafting (CAD), bio-related technology, control robotics programming technology, electronic publishing/ multimedia, computer assembly, screen print technology/ graphic design and structural engineering, he said.

In addition, students can learn about subjects such as digital photography, electricity, small gasoline engines and keyboarding.

Hawkins said that one of the reasons why technology education has seen a major jump in enrollment is because of the growing awareness about the role of technology in everyday life.

That need for "technological literacy" has caused a rise in the enrollment of female students in technology education programs. Last year 35 percent of technology education students were female. Hawkins said programs such as computer-aided drafting, robotics and Internet applications are especially appealing to them.

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Top Ford designer learned craftsmanship from vocational drafting program

According to J Mays, vice president of design for Ford Motor Corporation, the most important lesson he learned from vocational education was craftsmanship and what he describes as "the satisfaction of doing something well."

That's what makes Mays, the designer of the new Volkswagen Beetle and Ford Thunderbird, one of Oklahoma's Vo-Tech Champions.

Vo-Tech Champions are alumni of the system's programs or student organizations who have found success in a career and attribute much of that success to their vocational experience.

Thousands of car enthusiasts have enjoyed Mays' craftsmanship by either driving or viewing his creations. Mays was responsible for redesigning the Volkswagen Beetle, and his concept for the Ford Thunderbird made its debut at the 1999 North American International Auto Show.

His career has taken him from a small town in Oklahoma to Munich, Germany, and now Detroit, Mich., where he is one of Ford's top designers.

That journey began in a vocational drafting program at Mid-America Technology Center, Wayne.

While a student at Maysville High School, Mays enrolled in Mid-America's drafting program because he wanted to become an architect. He thought it would be good preparation for college.

J Mays is a top designer at Ford Motor Company and a Vo-Tech Champion.

"I was looking for a creative outlet, and I saw it (the drafting program) as a chance to sharpen my skills," Mays said.

After graduating from Maysville High School in 1972, Mays enrolled in the University of Oklahoma as an art student. He later switched to journalism and studied that for three years before returning to his first love, art.

Mays went on to study at Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, Calif. After graduating in 1980, he was recruited by Audi to work as a designer in Germany.

He said his background in drafting gave him a good foundation for design school.

"My vocational training made me understand the execution of clarity that is needed for commercial art or automotive design," Mays said.

Mays was also employed by BMW in Germany where he worked on exterior design proposals for the BMW 5 and 8 series. He returned to the U.S. in 1989 and took a position as chief designer in Volkswagen of America's Design Center in Simi Valley, Calif. At Volkswagen he was responsible for the design and branding of the Volkswagen Concept 1, the precursor to the new Beetle.

In 1997, Mays was named vice president of design for Ford Automotive Operations. In that position, he is responsible for designs on all Ford cars and vehicles produced by Ford's sister companies such as Mazda, Lincoln and Mercury. Mays said his vocational training gave him a good foundation for college, and it was a change of pace from regular high school classes.

"I think vocational education offers young people a different insight away from the high school routine," he said.

SkillsUSA-VICA students raise awareness about shrinking pool of skilled labor

The later part of the 20th century saw amazing technological advancements such as the Internet. However, there is still a need for skilled workers in professions like masonry, carpentry and electronics, according to Stephen York, an Oklahoma businessman who has thrown his weight behind the "Building Skills for America" campaign.

The campaign, which is being coordinated by trade and industrial students across the nation, seeks to raise awareness about America's dwindling pool of skilled labor. Trade and industrial education students (who are studying programs such as carpentry, electronics, masonry and machining) have pledged to gather one million signatures for the nationwide campaign.

"No matter how much we refine the Internet, we are still going to need plumbing and a dry roof over our heads," said York, who is president of York Electronic Systems, a company that specializes in integrating electronics devices such as video cameras, intercoms and closed-circuit televisions into buildings.

York said that his firm often hires trade and industrial education graduates from computer-aided drafting and electronics programs. He currently has students from Oklahoma State University-Okmulgee and Tulsa Technology Center working for him.

It is important for young people to have a fully rounded education that includes both academic and practical skills, York said.

Trade and industrial education students have been involved in the Building Skills for America signature campaign for the past few months, said Marsha Daves, state SkillsUSA-VICA coordinator. SkillsUSA-VICA, the career and technical education student organization for trade and industrial education students, was previously known as the Vocational Industrial Clubs of America (VICA). The Building Skills for America signature campaign is also raising awareness about SkillsUSA-VICA's name change, she said.

"It is a nationwide effort to promote vocational education and highlight the nation's shortage of skilled workers," Daves said.

Skilled workers will be in high demand in the near future. According to a study by the Oklahoma Department of Vocational-Technical Education, the construction industry is projected to add more than 11,000 jobs and account for about 24 percent of Oklahoma's top industry employment growth from 1994-2005.

Many of the careers that fall into the skilled labor category are from the trade and industrial education field, Daves said.

Students participating in the signature campaign have a highly organized strategy, explained Daves. They have speakers' kits, which they are using in presentations to local chambers of commerce, civic organizations, school boards and professional associations.

"Students can also keep track of how many names have been collected for the campaign through the SkillsUSA-VICA Web site at <www.vica.org>," Daves said.

Ann Benson, state vo-tech director, is pictured here presenting a plaque honoring the dedication of the Tuttle Seminar Center at the Oklahoma Department of Vocational and Technical Education. Pictured from left are Benson, Vivian Tuttle, Dr. Francis Tuttle's widow, daughter Kay Black and son Al Tuttle. Tuttle was state vo-tech director from 1967-78 and is widely regarded as the architect of Oklahoma's vo-tech system that today serves as a national model.

Internet adds new dimension to job shadow day

More than 7,000 Oklahoma students took part in this year's Groundhog Job Shadow Day activities, according to the Oklahoma School-to-Work office. Students spent the day working alongside adults at more than 5,500 Oklahoma businesses.

Students shadowed with a variety of professionals, including legislators, businessmen, computer technicians, highway patrol officers and research scientists.

"School-to-Work coordinators from across the state reported that students had job shadowing experiences ranging from lunch with the governor to helping a veterinarian deliver a colt," said Dr. Belinda McCharen, state School-to-Work coordinator.

Students also shadowed with State Superintendent Sandy Garrett and Secretary of Agriculture Dennis Howard, she said.

McCharen also said that many of the School-to-Work partnerships had received positive comments from business partners and also reported increased participation.

During Groundhog Job Shadow Day 2000, many students were able to participate in "virtual job shadowing" with partners thousands of miles away.

"Virtual job shadowing allows students to follow various career mentors via the Internet," McCharen said.

Virtual job shadowing was sponsored by Monster.com, an Internet employment firm, which helped promote Groundhog Job Shadow Day by running a series of ads featured during the Super Bowl.

McCharen said several national celebrities also signed up to be virtual job shadows. They included Texas governor George W. Bush; Kevin Sorbo of the "Hercules: The Legendary Journeys" television show; Curtis Pride, a professional baseball player; and Jonathan Young, White House public liaison.

Branscum takes over as new Metro Tech superintendent

Dr. James Branscum recently replaced Kara Gae Wilson as superintendent of Metro Tech. He joined the Oklahoma City technology center after serving 13 years as vice president for business affairs at Rose State College, Midwest City.

A native of Okemah, Branscum received his bachelor's and master's degrees from East Central University and doctorate in education from the University of Oklahoma.

Branscum's career in education includes stints as an English teacher at Konawa and Holdenville High Schools and serving as assistant principal and principal at Holdenville. In 1977, Branscum was appointed director of Kiamichi Technology Center in Hugo.

Dr. James Branscum was recently named superintedent at Metro Tech. He previously served as vice president for business affairs at Rose State College.

During his tenure at Kiamichi Technology Center, he coordinated curriculum development and is credited with new program development and establishing two new facilities.

"We are proud to have Dr. Branscum as part of the Metro Tech family," said E. Elaine Schuster, president of the school's board of education. "Over the past years, Metro Tech has experienced many milestones, and we are now ready to flourish. I am confident that under Dr. Branscum's leadership, Metro Tech will do just that."

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Four instructors receive NATE certification

The Oklahoma Department of Vocational and Technical Education supports a coalition of heat, ventilation, air conditioning and refrigeration manufacturers who are working to ensure a national standards for industry technicians.

Four Oklahoma technology center instructors are now certified under new national industry standards after successfully passing a series of certification exams developed by NATE (North American Technician Excellence), according to Dr. James Sharpton, state vo-tech trade and industry assistant program administrator.

These instructors, who are also mechanical contractors, are David Murphy, Canadian Valley Technology Center, El Reno; Mark Clemons, Meridian Technology, Stillwater; Mike Darnell, Red River Technology Center; and Ron Coffee, Mid-America Technology Center.

NATE certification is designed for installation and service technicians who work on residential and light commercial equipment and systems, air conditioning, air distribution, gas heating, heat pumps, and oil heating.

"Our industry has accepted this one standard as a means of comparing technical skills of potential employees," said Keith Rhea, training services manager for YORK International. The firm is the largest independent supplier of heating, ventilating, air conditioning and refrigeration (HVAC&R) equipment in the United States and a leading competitor in the industry internationally.

YORK's products are sold in more than 100 countries, and the firm has about 25,000 employees worldwide.

Leading trade HVAC&R organizations, such as Refrigeration Service Engineers Society (RSES) and Air Conditioning Cooling Contractors of America (ACCA) and others, are in agreement on setting this standard certification for the industry, according to Rhea.

NATE certifies only those technicians who achieve mastery of an industry-approved level of knowledge, Sharpton said. The tests are developed by industry leaders and reflect a consensus opinion of what the average technician should know to effectively install and service HVAC&R systems.

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