



PUTTING A PLUG IN BRAIN DRAIN

Businesses make training of students a vocation

By Robin Taylor-Turner

Local businesses and vocational school students make for a model collaboration that helps stymie brain drain in the area.

Witness their relationship at the Porter County Career and Technical Education Center in Valparaiso.

The program provides about 30 different disciplines to some 100 Porter County and Hobart high school students, says director Jon Groth. The programs are available to juniors and seniors.

"We help students experience a career," she adds.

"We help them plan for what they'll do after high school. Even if they consider post-secondary education, they've identified what they want to pursue. It's too expensive to go to college and just experiment today."

Students go to classes at their respective high schools in the mornings and attend

classes at the training center in the afternoon. They earn high school credit as well as free college credit, between three and 12 hours.

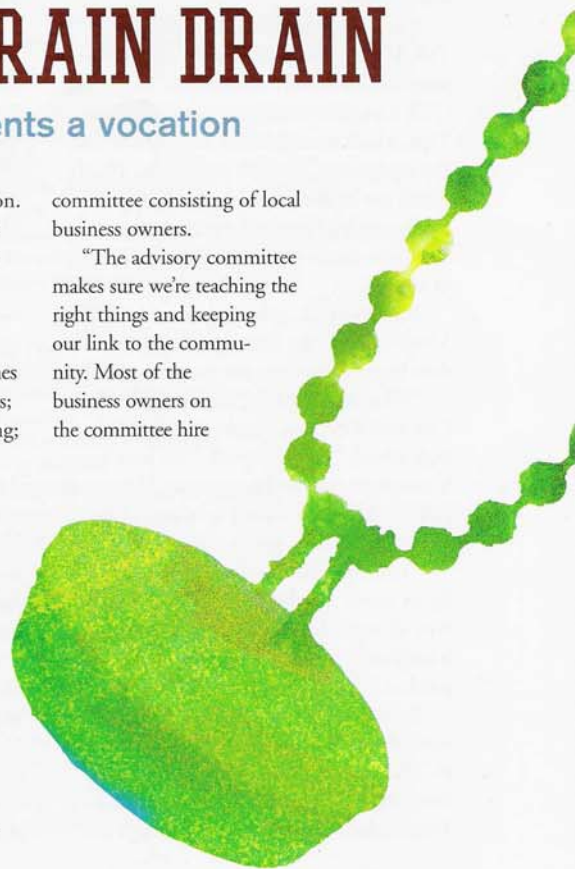
"Most of the programs have some sort of state or national certification," Groth explains.

The center offers classes in such disciplines as Television Production/Telecommunications; Health Care; Cabinet and Furniture Making; Business Technology; Sports and Entertainment Marketing; Business Ownership; Child Care; Cosmetology; Culinary Services; Landscaping and Horticulture; Law Enforcement; Architectural Design & Manufacturing; CAD; Modern Machining Technology; Printing Technology; Welding Technology; Industrial Mechanics; Auto Technology; Construction Technology; Diesel Mechanics; and various School-to-Work programs.

Groth says the program has an advisory

committee consisting of local business owners.

"The advisory committee makes sure we're teaching the right things and keeping our link to the community. Most of the business owners on the committee hire





Robert Weay

The Porter County Career Center in Valparaiso provides real-world, hands-on training for vocational students.

our students out of high school. It's about maintaining long relationships with the community."

Cory Mack, production supervisor at Task Force Tips in Valparaiso, says his company has had nearly 30 students from the CTE school-to-work program. Task Force Tips, which manufactures fire nozzles and fire equipment, has 135 employees, 10 of which are in the school-to-work program. Mack says it's beneficial to the students to learn a trade, even if they decide to go to college.

Bill Stockwell, general manager of PSC Machining in East Chicago, also hires student apprentices from the program.

"What we're looking for is students that have had some basic mechanical programs in high school," says Stockwell. "We have mostly computer-operated equipment. If they take CAD or blueprint classes, it helps. Porter County CTE has a pretty nice program.

"The students have good basics and they figure out if they have an interest in this type of work. In my career, you have to like what you're doing or you're not going to be good at it."

Students in the program are eligible for more than employment from local businesses. The Career Center Auto Technology Program has a partnership with Automotive Youth Educational Systems. Through the

partnership, students work part time in the summer at local dealerships and receive a \$5,000 tool chest.

AYES partners include American Honda, Audi of America, BMW of North America, Daimler Chrysler, General Motors, Mercedes Benz, Subaru of America, Toyota USA, and Volkswagen of America.

In April 2004, the Building Trades Class helped Habitat for Humanity build a house. The class also built its own house that sold in one weekend.

Of the Porter County CTE students during the current school year, 45 percent are working toward a Core 40 diploma, 21 percent are working toward an Academic Honors diploma, and 34 percent are working toward a regular high school diploma.

According to CTE's 2004 annual report, a 2002 survey of more than 400 Porter vocational students who graduated in 2002 said 100 percent of those surveyed reported receiving good vocational instruction in the program; 97 percent said they left the program with good problem-solving skills, a well-developed work ethic, and good basic skills; 91 percent said they were well prepared for further on-the-job training; 86 percent were employed; 78 percent were employed in a job directly related to their high school vocational education program; and 64 percent were enrolled in

post-secondary study.

College-level vocational students also benefit from the support of local business.

Purdue University Calumet's vocational program also depends on local business to help prevent brain drain in Northwest Indiana. By offering vocational programs in local colleges and universities and partnering with local business, students have an opportunity for employment in Northwest Indiana instead of moving to other areas to find work.

"Our graduates are in pretty high demand, depending on the economy," says Roy Evans, head of Construction Management and Engineering Technology at the Hammond school.

"Our students primarily concentrate on working with construction companies. Construction is one of the largest industries in our region."

Evans says his department offers certificate programs, as well as associate's and bachelor's degrees in project management, estimating, construction management and others.

He said he also relies on an advisory committee, which includes members of the Building Trades Council.

Rosalyn L. Mitchell, owner of the architectural firm Forms + Funktion Inc. in Gary, graduated from Purdue Cal with an associate's degree in Architectural Technology and a bachelor's in Building Construction.

"The program is great," she says. "It gave me a great architectural foundation. At Purdue, I learned the technical side of building and that technical background really carried me through."

Mitchell, who has served as director of planning for the city of Gary, says the courses she took prepared her for the workplace.

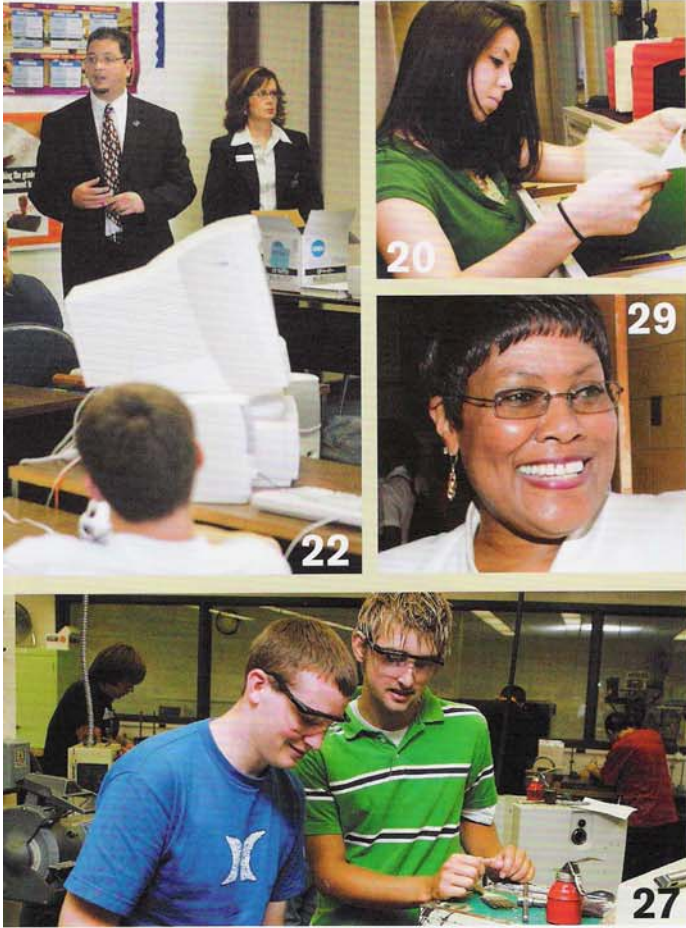
"Having instructors who had worked in the field made a more realistic and educated experience in the classroom," she adds.

Sharese Dudley, interim director of career services at Indiana University Northwest in Gary, says it is important to sustain the intellectual resources of the community by helping graduates get jobs in Northwest Indiana.

"We try to keep people here if we can," she says. "We have quite a few students that come in."

She says her department recruits potential employers through e-mails, postcards and off-campus events. She uses similar methods to inform students of the services offered in the Career Services department.

Dudley says Walgreens, The Methodist Hospitals and UPS are among companies that frequently hire IUN students.



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