

BUSINESSMAN'S EFFORTS HELP REINVENT VALLEY TECH



Blackstone Valley Tech students learn how to operate lathes in the school's updated manufacturing technologies shop.

WHAT STARTED AS A SINGLE LOCAL BUSINESSMAN SEARCHING FOR WAYS TO HELP A SCHOOL MEET HIS WORKFORCE NEEDS HAS TURNED INTO A LONG-TERM COMMITMENT, AND A STRUCTURED PARTNERSHIP WHICH HAS HAD A SIGNIFICANT POSITIVE IMPACT ON EDUCATION.

By Diane B. Pedersen

Machine shop and metal fabrication programs across the country have struggled since the mid-1980s when the rise in global competition resulted in more manufacturing jobs going overseas. Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School in Upton, Massachusetts, was able to keep its program up and running due in large part to its partnership with a local businessman.



Employees at the Lampin Corporation are shown a new piece of equipment in Blackstone Valley Tech's manufacturing technologies program.

Thanks to Scott Rossiter, the former owner and operator of Lampin Corporation (a manufacturer of precision-machined components), Valley Tech now has a thriving state-of-the-art manufacturing technologies program. Able to provide area businesses with capable employee candidates trained to current workforce standards, Valley Tech is considered a model school system on state and national levels. When Valley Tech opened in 1965, government surplus equipment was used to prepare students for jobs as machinists, welders and industrial manufacturing workers.

Some 20 years later, the machine shop and metal fabrication programs had not been updated and faced declining enrollment due to lack of interest and poor job placement opportunities. Seeking machinists and metal workers for his growing company, Rossiter reached out to the local career and technical school for future workers. He knew the potential existed, but was disappointed with what he found.

"I was not impressed with the caliber or motivation of the students in the program at the time," Rossiter said. "Most of them did not want to be in that shop and they didn't plan to actually work in the manufacturing field after they graduated."

Rossiter was determined to save the Valley Tech manufacturing program and to improve the talent pool for employee recruitment.

Business and Industry Involvement

Collaborating with the school's co-operative education coordinator and instructors, Rossiter reached out to other machine shop owners in the region and established a program which paired a mentor from local industry with every student in the shop. He ensured there were representatives from local businesses on hand at the school's annual open house to show prospective students and their parents the lucrative employment opportunities for workers with top-notch industrial skills. Though the fledgling Lampin Corporation had no money to donate at that time, Rossiter provided a wealth of expertise and motivation which was instrumental in reviving a faltering educational program and improving his own company's prospects.

As the partnership between Valley Tech and Lampin solidified, both entities flourished. When Michael Fitzpatrick became Valley Tech superintendent in 1994, Rossiter had a new partner who shared his vision and endorsed his crusade to prove that the Ameri-

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can machine shop could survive despite ever-increasing worldwide competition. Valley Tech divested itself of obsolescent equipment, merged the industrial manufacturing and welding programs into a consolidated manufacturing technologies program, and obtained financing to lease new equipment. An expanding Lampin was able to provide matching funding to help purchase additional new state-of-the-art equipment for the school's program.

"I decided to make my donation to the school through the local chamber of commerce as a way to call attention to the benefits of partnering with local schools and encourage other businesses to get involved," Rossiter said.

Updating Valley Tech's Equipment

Each year for several years, Rossiter met with Valley Tech instructors to discuss program equipment needs, and they jointly agreed on new equipment that could enhance the curriculum and improve the employability of the program's students. As a result of this collaboration, the school's curriculum was revised to reflect the computerization of the industrial manufacturing environment, and the need for workers to be trained in computer-aided drafting and manufacturing procedures. The program now has a pre-engineering focus and integrates with the school's drafting program via the Internet in a real-life industrial practice.

Lampin funds over the past 10 years have enabled the Valley Tech program to add two Mill Power three-axis CNC milling machines, an SL-10 Haas CNC lathe, a 1340 manual lathe, four CAD/CAM training stations equipped with AutoCAD7 and Mastercam7 software, and a Hurco CNC vertical milling machining center. These additional training tools have sparked enthusiasm among students for the highly technical jobs that are found in today's manufacturing environment. Rossiter credits his involvement with Valley Tech with awakening his awareness of educational issues. When the chamber of commerce created an educational foundation several years ago, Lampin was

among the first to provide grant funding for school projects, stipulating that \$5,000 be earmarked each year for Valley Tech manufacturing technologies equipment. He spearheaded an annual career fair and Teach It tours of workplaces for local teachers, and has supported the involvement of Lampin personnel on the Valley Tech manufacturing technologies advisory committee.

Maintaining Ties

Rossiter recently sold Lampin to his employees, though he remains chairman of the board. The company, which now has a staff of 25 and annual revenues of \$5 million, continues to donate to the chamber educational foundation and earmark funds for Valley Tech. The Valley Tech advisory committee, instructors and school administrators participate in the grant application process, and foundation board members review the application to ensure accountability for the annual purchase.

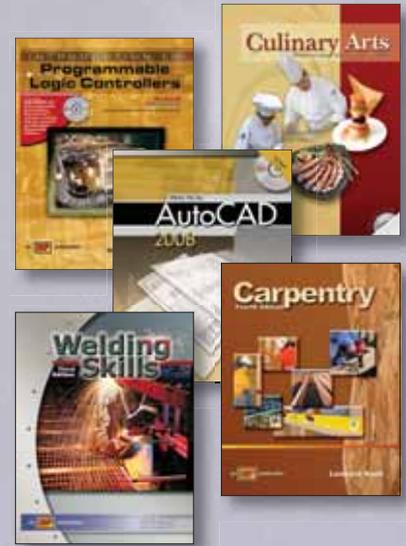
Fitzpatrick notes that Lampin's relationship with Valley Tech has proven to be a rewarding and extremely valuable collaboration for both parties.

"Several of the Lampin employees who are now part owners of the corporation are Valley Tech alumni," he said. "We are proud of their success in the field."

What started as a single local businessman searching for ways to help a school meet his workforce needs has turned into a long-term commitment, and a structured partnership which has had a significant positive impact on education. Valley Tech was recently named a High Schools That Work Pacesetter School; its students are the greatest benefactors. Just two years ago, Valley Tech's Jillian Dumont captured a state gold medal in the annual SkillsUSA Massachusetts CNC machining competition. She was the only female student to compete in her trade area at the National SkillsUSA competition, and finished a remarkable fourth in the nation. ■



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