Partnerships DESIGNED TO MEET Customer Needs

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The state-of-the-art Butler Tech Public Safety Education Complex in Liberty Township, Ohio, is an advanced training facility designed to meet the increasingly technical requirements of

preparing for careers in law enforcement and firefighting.

AN OVERARCHING GOAL WAS TO PROVIDE A REAL-WORLD LEARNING ENVIRONMENT ACCLIMATING STUDENTS TO THEIR FUTURE WORKPLACES AND THE FUTURE EMPLOYMENT NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY.

By Mike Dingeldein

It is nearly impossible for one individual or a small committee to understand the complex needs of an entire school system and its community. Only by partnering with local business and community leaders, parents, teachers and third-party experts can local boards of education and school administrators grasp the unique needs of their community. And only then can educational facilities be developed or renovated to meet these needs. While collecting and organizing feedback from various stakeholders may seem insurmountable, many schools are finding it to be a worthwhile investment. When approached properly, community partnerships can result in schools that are designed to prepare students to meet the unique needs of their communities. Students obtain valuable knowledge to prepare for the future, and at the same time the community gains access to an eager and experienced talent pool right out of school.

School systems that include community stakeholders in the planning and design of career and technical education (CTE) facilities are establishing partnerships for years to come. These partnerships result in tightly integrated academic and technical curricula, and the schools' programming more frequently is mirroring the needs of the local business community. This, in turn, can better equip

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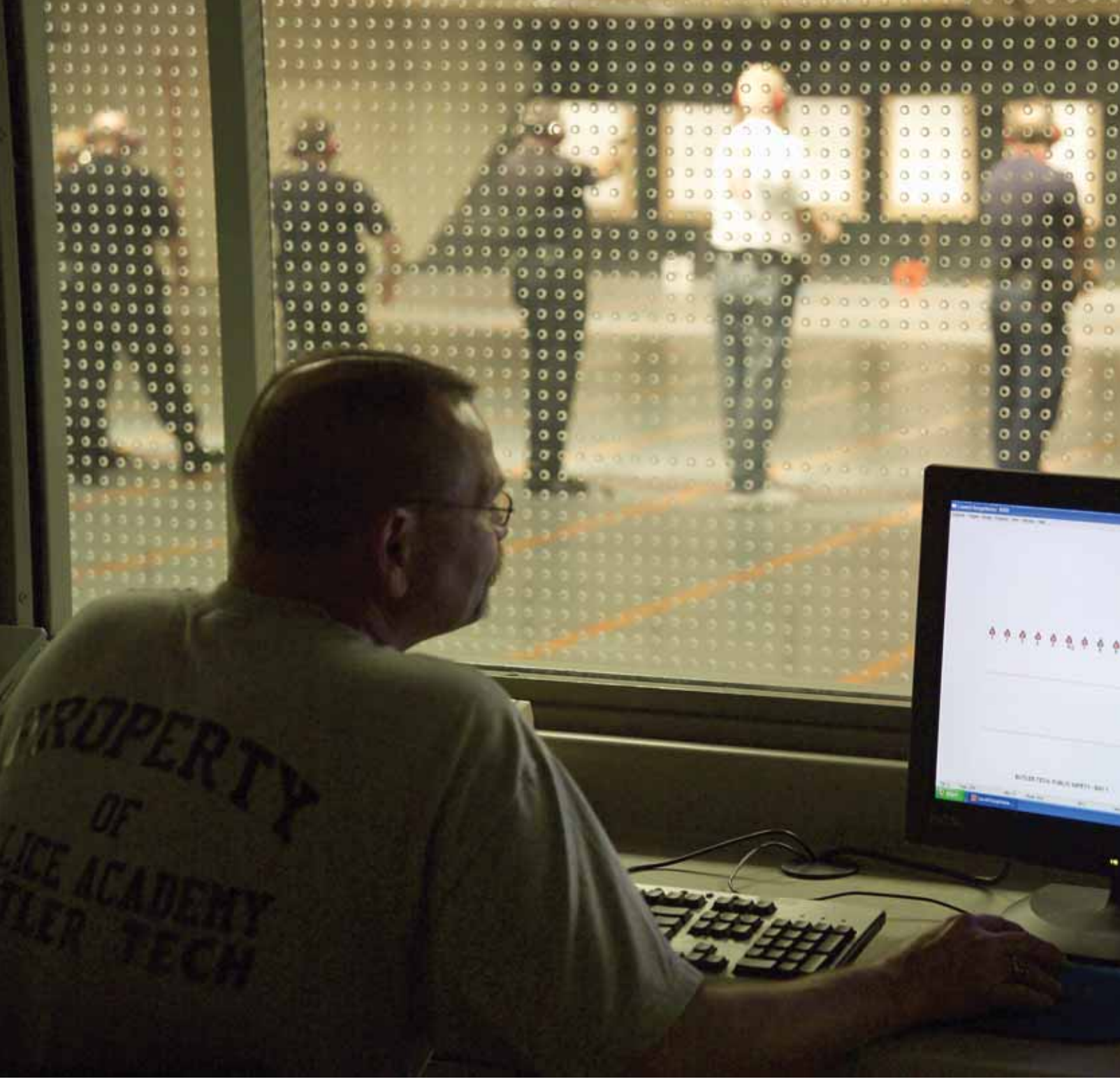

One instructor can oversee Butler Tech's entire 20-lane indoor shooting range, which can create day and nighttime situations for both live and computerized firearm training.

our country's CTE system to rise to the challenge of producing a workforce with the specialized skills businesses want.

Workforce Needs Driving School Changes

The Baldwin County Public School District in Alabama is facing the challenge of producing a strong workforce to meet economic development demands and to continue to attract industry to the area. Located in the second fastest growing county in one of the fastest growing states in the United States, Baldwin County's schools have experienced explosive growth as a result of businesses moving to the county, and there is increased pressure to produce a more skilled workforce for the future. The school system also faces challenges due to its sheer geographical size. Baldwin County is one of the largest counties east of the Mississippi River, spanning approximately 90 miles north to south and 45 miles east to west.

This geography poses logistical challenges regarding how to develop consensus across the stakeholders located in rural, suburban and urban communities, including a diverse group of students, parents, teachers, staff, administrators, business partners and community members. Within the school system, there is a need to balance curriculum,

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communication, technology, staffing, resources, facilities and student services for more than 26,000 students and nearly 4,000 employees. Baldwin schools consist of seven existing middle, high and CTE school facilities as well as four countywide business communities that have a particular interest in the growth of the automotive, aviation, health care and construction industries. The school system requires an effective strategic plan for the future direction of their CTE programming.

Getting a Consensus

Members of the board of education and the county's school administration recognized the importance of obtaining input from all potential stakeholders, regarding whether the tentative plan to build a new high school dedicated to technical education was the right solution. The county engaged architecture firm Steed Hammond Paul to implement its community engagement process to explore what the community values about technical education, including likes and dislikes of the offering, whether it is meeting their needs and what kind of experience they have and want to have when they drive by, arrive at and enter a facility. (The firm has designed CTE facilities such as The Butler Tech Public Safety Education Complex in Liberty Township, Ohio, and Aveda Fredric's Institute in Indianapolis, Indiana, both pictured in this article.) This two-way process of collaboration has the goal of gathering information in a methodical and thorough way that is used to influence and direct the design development process. Research consisted of seven individual two-hour focus groups, one for each middle, high and technical school combination. Each group was made up of a blend of about eight to 10 instructors, staff, students and parents, involving a total of approximately 60 people. Additionally, four two-hour focus groups were held, one for each business representative within the four community zones.

The groups represented a mix of industries among the eight to 10 participants and involved a total of approximately 30 people. The research process also included approximately 400 written and telephone surveys to gain additional perspective related to current and future educational offerings. The input gathered during the research process helped gauge interest from community members regarding particular solutions or programs, how relevant they believe those offerings to be, and how willing they would be to either participate in or support a particular decision or program. Four approaches regarding the future configuration of the educational facilities were tested to evaluate how each delivered on the community's needs, including whether or not the CTE schools should make the transition from traditional career academy to an all-inclusive integrated high school and CTE offering. Steed Hammond Paul is currently analyzing the results and will make recommendations based on what model will most effectively deliver CTE for Baldwin County.

Business Community Input Results in Corporate Design

Nearly 700 miles away in Cincinnati, Steed Hammond Paul had initiated a similar community input process for Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS) when the district looked to reinvent the oldest public school west of the Allegheny Mountains. Located in an urban area, the redesign of Woodward Career Technical High School (Woodward Tech) focused on designing the high school to provide strong academic choices students need for postsecondary education and to also offer career training. An overarching goal was to provide a real-world learning environment acclimating students to their future workplaces and the future employment needs of the community.

As a result, the community engagement effort was expanded beyond Woodward Tech's administration, staff and students to potential students, parents and community leaders throughout the district. Seven focus groups were conducted that included current Woodward Tech students and teachers, district wide sixth- through eighth-grade students, parents of sixth- through 12th-

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Fiber-optic lighting pokes through a domed ceiling that looks like a starry sky in the dark blue rejuvenation room at Aveda Fredric's Institute in Indianapolis, Indiana.

grade students, at-risk students, Cincinnati business leaders and community members. Like Baldwin Public Schools' process, Cincinnati-area business members provided additional input to ensure the facility contained the proper tools necessary to train and educate potential future employees. The process also included written and telephone surveys to help further understand the community's wants and needs. The result is a design that encourages students to think about their futures after leaving high school. Woodward Tech is designed to appear as a corporate business headquarters, with a striking 25-foot glass-wall atrium that showcases the educational offerings and student activity inside the building.

A State-of the-Art Facility

The community input process played a key role not only in shaping the bricks and mortar of the new facility, but also in influencing the direction of the curriculum. The school includes three two-story wings that house specialized career programs that mirror the needs of the local job market in Cincinnati. The availability of these programs—including advanced manufacturing technologies, building technologies, entrepreneurship and health technologies—is a direct result of the building's innovative design because the programs require training that could not be taught inside a standard classroom. Each wing provides students with the benefits of a smaller class size, enabling students to receive individualized attention. Classrooms feature large windows that create a visual connection between entry-level students concentrating on coursework to advanced students engaged in laboratory applications.

The real-world learning environments resemble anything but typical classrooms, customized to provide the tools and space necessary to support the program and specialization a student chooses. Woodward Tech's health technologies wing, for example, features the same amenities found in any health facility, including laboratories, patient examination rooms and functional hospital beds. The building technologies wing contains a two-story garage capable of accommodating heavy machinery, as well

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The main cutting room at Aveda Fredic's Institute in Indianapolis, Indiana, features 60 haircutting stations that are designed to roll away when the space needs to accommodate large events, such as a fashion show.

as operational loading docks, tool shelves and equipment lockers to provide students with hands-on, contextual learning opportunities in fields such as construction or landscaping. In addition to the specialized wings, the school boasts modern common areas that replicate contemporary corporate environments and create a very open and welcoming atmosphere. The school's new 8,000-square-foot open cafetorium (cafeteria and auditorium combination) creates a common gathering space that also simulates a work atmosphere.

The space is outfitted with the latest audio-visual equipment and interactive flat-panel television screens. Transparent glass and large windows throughout the area provide an abundance of natural light and impressive views of the landscaping, outside patio and the surrounding neighborhood. To showcase the pride of the past, the design also incorporates the Woodward Museum (previously housed in the basement of the former high school) behind a glass-enclosed wall near the atrium. The museum pays homage to the school's founder and Cincinnati leader, William Woodward, as well as notable alumni such as U.S. President and Supreme Court Justice William Howard Taft and William McGuffey, an education pioneer and creator of the famed McGuffey Reader. It is evident by looking at Woodward Tech that it isn't a typical high school. The design has enabled CPS to develop curriculums that better prepare its students for the workforce.

Building Lasting Community Bonds

As the input processes of the Baldwin County school district and Woodward Tech communities illustrate, schools thrive with community support. Incorporating ideas from the community and key stakeholders makes decisions more clear and produces more innovative designs. The beauty of this input is that the resulting designs turn CTE schools into modern-day training facilities, thereby expanding the very definition of schoolhouse. In doing so, the school increases the number of customers they can serve. And just as more customers spell greater success for businesses, more customers add up to greater support for CTE. T