

The superintendent of Arizona's oldest career and technical education (CTE) school has a simple formula for engaging employers in CTE: Give them great return on investment.

"To get industry involved we have to deliver a product they want," said Sally Downey, superintendent of the East Valley Institute of Technology (EVIT) in Mesa. "These are business people. They come to us because they need the skilled workforce that we produce. They will get involved in our programs, but they have to see a return on their investment."

EVIT, which offers 40 CTE programs and turns out approximately 1,000 to 1,200 program completers each year, works closely with Arizona business and industry. Every program has an advisory council of industry representatives who help guide the curriculum, offer internships and job shadowing for students, and donate equipment and other resources. Their expertise and the hands-on experiences they provide ensure that EVIT students are trained to meet the latest industry standards and are motivated to stay in school.

As a result, EVIT students have a 96 percent high school graduation rate—20 percentage points higher than Arizona's graduation rate—and an 87 percent placement rate. From 2012 to 2015, within one year of completing their training, 870 EVIT students were hired by the following Arizona industries:

- Health Care—321
- Cosmetology—150
- Automotive—96
- Culinary Arts—91
- Building trades (construction, machining, welding, HVAC)—76
- Other (aviation, information technology, early childhood education, fashion and interior design, firefighting, law enforcement, communications)—136

Those numbers account only for students who were hired within one year. During that same time period, many other EVIT alumni would have graduated from college or other postsecondary training and entered the workforce.

Dante Fierros, president of Nichols Precision in Tempe, Arizona, hired six alumni from EVIT's Machining Technology program in the last 18 months—and they have all worked out great, he said. He bases his hiring decisions on what prospective employees have learned, their attitude and what they know. EVIT students get high marks in part because EVIT's machining program is accredited by the National Institute of Metalworking Skills, Inc., and they have the opportunity to earn NIMS credentials.

Fierros said students who come out of a machining program like EVIT's "have

demonstrated to employers that they have a tremendous work ethic because they've taken the program for two years at a school with a proven track record and certification process."

Building Industry Support

Few programs at EVIT enjoy as much industry support as the Construction Technologies program. Enrollment declined during the real estate crash in the Phoenix market, but now, as that industry is coming back, so are the students who are interested in a construction career. With 50 students currently enrolled, instructor



Industry Support Helps EVIT CTE Programs

Thrive

By CeCe Todd



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Photo courtesy of Patrick Jervis

▲ Okland Construction partners with EVIT's Construction Technologies program to ensure that students are being trained to the latest industry standards.



Photo courtesy of Patrick Jervis

▲ The City of Mesa Fire Department is a frequent visitor to the East Valley Institute of Technology, as experienced firefighters help train EVIT Fire Science students.

Billy DeWitt is having no trouble lining up industry support. This year, the Home Builders Association of Central Arizona provided work boots, textbooks and tools; Sundt Construction donated \$5,000; the Association of the Wall and Ceiling Contractors of Arizona and Okland Construction provided materials; and an estimator from Okland Construction taught the class about estimating.

"I reach out to industry to find out what they are looking for. They want employees who are well-rounded in construction," DeWitt said. "I get calls every day from those who want to partner with us."

Bill Okland, president of Okland Construction, noted that EVIT provides hands-on training that gives students a real-world application. "Okland is a strong supporter of this type of training because

it fosters advanced skills that can be immediately applied upon the students' hire in the workforce," he said.

EVIT is both a CTE school for high school students and adults, as well as a joint technological education district (JTED), with satellite programs in 10 member school districts. Annette Schmidt oversees EVIT's satellite programs in the Higley Unified School District in Gilbert, Arizona. She also taught Fashion Design and Merchandising at a high school in another district, where she saw firsthand the need for industry involvement in CTE. "I was lucky to be introduced to the owners of Junky Trunk, a fashion retail store. They were wonderful and were able to give me and my students a current view of the industry," she said. "This helped me to understand the changes that were taking place in the industry, and it helped my students see how the fashion industry really works and to begin to understand the many entry points available to them if they wanted to pursue a career in the fashion industry."

Schmidt said CTE programs can be run without the aid of industry, but they would be nothing more than basic knowledge programs using outdated information. "All CTE teachers have had some industry experience," she said, "but industry is constantly changing, and if teachers don't have access to strong industry partnerships and advisors, their instruction will quickly become outdated."

CTE in Arizona has always generated industry support, especially when the law creating JTEDs was passed in the 1990s. The law allowed districts to join together to offer high-cost, high-quality CTE programs so that each district wouldn't have to support expensive programs on its own. But business leaders also saw a benefit: They recognized that high-quality CTE could help build a highly qualified workforce.

Jim Zaharis, vice president of education for Greater Phoenix Leadership, was superintendent of Arizona's largest school district, Mesa Public Schools, when the EVIT JTED was born. "Many businesses were involved, especially the automotive association, the construction industry, cosmetology and later, health care," he

said. “Business and policy leaders were very interested in the development of JTEDs and of EVIT in particular.”

Today, EVIT has hundreds of business partners. Over the years, no one in the business community has been more engaged with EVIT than Steve Marley, service director for Thorobred Chevrolet, a car dealership in Chandler, Arizona. Thorobred provides job-shadowing experiences for EVIT’s Automotive students every year; serves as a sponsor for EVIT’s radio station, 88.7FM *The Pulse*; and donates a car to be given away in a drawing for students who have perfect attendance. When EVIT first started, Marley even helped the school’s public relations team by going out to the community to promote EVIT. “We spent a lot of time in the early years just going to the schools and encouraging the counselors to come see what EVIT had to offer,” he said.

Since 2000, Thorobred Chevrolet has hired more than 20 EVIT students who are “disciplined, skilled workers, well-trained in the basics and familiar with automotive equipment,” Marley said, adding that it’s the quality of EVIT’s training facility, equipment and instructors that results in EVIT producing well-trained workers.

Investment and Trust

Arizona business leaders not only support EVIT through partnerships with particular programs, but also through support of the EVIT Foundation, a 501 (c)(3) that raises money to help low-income students pay for uniforms and program fees. The foundation’s signature event, a gourmet breakfast prepared by EVIT Culinary Arts students, attracts about 400 business, community and elected leaders each year. This year’s breakfast raised a record \$80,000.

During the foundation breakfast, Pat Brazil of George Brazil Home Services, was honored with the Olga Bender Award for her contributions to EVIT and CTE. Pat, the widow of George Brazil, an icon in Arizona’s plumbing industry, is the former CTE director for the state of California. She hand-picked EVIT to be the site of a new plumbing school in her husband’s name, giving EVIT \$150,000 in start-up money and equipment to get the school up and running.

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The George Brazil School of Plumbing not only teaches students the skills of the plumbing trade, but also the work ethic and commitment to customer service that George Brazil emphasized. “We want to make sure the school is training service plumbers to be the best they can be, that they care more for their customers than they do for themselves, and that they are constantly trying to be everything that George would have wanted,” Pat Brazil said.

Like George Brazil, Downey sets high standards for her employees and students, as well. And here are the results:

- The Cosmetology program has annual pass rates of well over 90 percent on the Arizona State Board of Cosmetology exams, and currently the program has a 100 percent pass rate on the practical exam.
- The Welding program has a nearly 100 percent success rate in placing students in jobs, college or the military, and is now a testing site for the American Welding Society.
- Seven programs—Aesthetics, Information Technology and Engineering Careers, Early Childhood Education, Machining Technology, Pharmacy Technician, Physical Therapy Technician and Radio/Audio Production—have 100 percent high school graduation rates.
- EVIT students had 100 percent pass rates on six of the most recent Arizona CTE Assessments—Dental

Assisting, Pharmacy Technician, Graphic/Web Design, Film and TV, Precision Machining, and Photography.

- Collision Repair was the only high school program in the nation selected in the fall for the \$50,000 Ultimate Collision Education Makeover Grant from the Collision Repair Education Foundation at I-CAR.
- EVIT was named an A+ School of Excellence by the Arizona Educational Foundation last spring.

A+ judges noted the strong relationship between the school and business and industry. “There is a type of synergy created between the business community, community colleges and the courses at EVIT,” the judges wrote in their critique. “EVIT has created and nurtured a significant investment and trust from the business community. This trust is the compilation of administrative leadership, high-quality curricula and a deeply seated culture of purpose that facilitates a dedication to learning.”

It’s a trust that Downey takes seriously. She stresses to her staff repeatedly the importance of engaging employers. “We can’t be siloed by ourselves out here,” she said. “We must have the input of business and industry.” **Tech**

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