

Nidec and technical college invest in students

The U.S. is facing a shortage of able workers in certain fields. As members of the Baby Boomer generation retire in greater and greater numbers, employers are struggling to find new, qualified people to fill their roles.

John Hussey, vice president of engineering at **Nidec North America**, says that “the challenge of finding skilled workers is compounded by the speed that technology is changing. Our highly trained and skilled workers are retiring. There are not enough properly trained replacements for them.” Nidec, a Japan-based corporation, is working with **Ranken Technical College** in St. Louis in order to combat this problem.

Nidec has invested in a brand-new, 26,000-square-foot training facility. Ranken students will train in this facility, gaining experience in technical roles while producing products for Nidec.

“We are very pleased to be working with Nidec,” said Stan Shoun, president of Ranken. “With these types of industry-driven programs, students have opportunities to engage in hands-on experiences that give them a competitive edge in the marketplace. And industries gain the technical skill sets that they so desperately need for their economic growth.”

The facility, which is expected to be finished sometime in late 2019, will be able to support between 100 and 150 students as they complete their technical training certifications, gaining crucial hands-on experience as they do.

The facility has already drawn praise from local organizations in Missouri, such as the Missouri Association of Manufacturers, which gave Ranken and Nidec the Made in Missouri Leadership Award in 2017.

Ranken, a nonprofit accredited college, has been offering opportunities to students and private organizations alike since 2010. The school calls it a “microenterprise” model. Through these programs, sometimes referred to as “reverse internships,” students get to practice inspecting parts and assembling products, testing and quality control, filing reports, and other skills pertinent to what they’re studying in technical industrial environments exactly as they would on the job.

Don Pohl, executive vice president of Ranken, said that these microenterprise arrangements are useful in circumstances where, due to the needs of either students or the companies working with Ranken, students can’t be sent out to work with a company.

“Instead of sending students to the work,” Pohl said, “we’ve asked the companies to bring the work to the students.” Students are paid as part-time employees, similar to an internship or an apprenticeship.



A student at work at Ranken, when the electrical manufacturer Nidec Corp. has invested in a new training facility. —Nidec Motor Corp. photo



From left to right: Nidec vice president of engineering John Hussey, Ranken president Stan Shoun, and Ranken department chairman and instructor Christopher Brueggeman. —Nidec Motor Corp. photo

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It’s a win-win for everyone involved: Ranken’s students benefit from hands-on experience with the skills they’re studying (not to mention being paid as part-time employees), and if they decide the work isn’t for them, as Pohl said, they have the freedom to “try before they buy” a full two to four years’ worth of tuition.

Likewise, companies like Nidec can train potential employees without having to invest in hiring and training a full-time employee, and once they graduate, they’re trained and ready to go. Organizations like Nidec also benefit from low-cost student labor to manufacture their products.

The new training center isn’t the first investment Nidec has made with Ranken. In 2017, Nidec, a company that makes electric motors for just about every conceivable application, installed a test stand pool for spa pump motors at Ranken so that students could learn about variable-speed pool pump motors and how to handle electric and plumbing hookups.

Beyond that, Ranken also used the stand pool test motors to teach students diagnostic skills; the students ran “accelerated life tests” on the test motors—running them in extreme conditions, causing them to fail far more quickly than they usually would.

In doing so, Ranken students were taught how to predict the expected life of electric motors, including potential weaknesses that a motor might have.

Nidec, which provided training personnel to help teach these classes, also gained valuable information about its equipment, which will be used to improve its products. This program saw so much success that in 2018, Nidec expanded its partnership with Ranken by installing a gas-fired test furnace for Ranken’s heating, ventilation, air conditioning, and refrigeration program.

This allowed Ranken to improve its microenterprise program with respect to its HVACR students, since they are now able to set up electric and gas furnaces and collect combustion flow and air movement data as part of their education. Nidec also provided educational staff to help train students with this equipment.

To learn more about Ranken’s educational and training opportunities, head to <https://ranken.edu/contact-us>, or call Ranken at (314) 286-4809.

If you have a training program you would like *Electrical Apparatus* to feature, you can e-mail the information to eamagazine@barks.com.—Matt Raebel