

# Tech Center is not your father's vocational school

## Majority of students pursue advanced degrees

By Max Roll

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EVANSVILLE — Jared Reidford, a senior at North Posey High School, has know for some time that when he graduates he wants to land a job where he works with his hands doing problem solving.

Reidford, who is in his first year at the Southern Indiana Career & Technical Center, enjoys the troubleshooting involved in the robotics course offered in the electrical program at the school.

On Saturday, he joined teacher Randy Borman for the school's open house, demonstrating to potential students the wonders of automated robots. For Reidford, programming the computers and operating them with touch-screen controllers was second nature.

"I was kind of already used to that technology," said Reidford, who aspires to be an electrician after high school. "With video games and all the technology we use today, it's a little bit easier to adapt to thinks like that."

Reidford and other North Posey students spend 2-1/2 hours every school day at the tech center. Of that time 45 minutes is spent in classrooms, engaging in conventional book learning. The rest of the time is spent doing what Borman, owner of his own residential and commercial electrical company, calls a "must" experience.

"I'm not a big fan of educational trainers," said Borman. "I like students to work and learn on equipment they're going to see in industry — I'm a proponent of that."

First-year students in the electrical program learn basic wiring and electrical conduits. The next year they follow the advanced robotics pathway, where they take what they learned the first year and apply it. They program controllers that handle automation robots, just like ones found on assembly lines at Toyota Motor Manufacturing, Indiana.

Borman said with the current condition of the economy, when manufacturing jobs are being shipped overseas for cheaper labor, companies are being forced to choose between using more manpower to make products or an automation robot. Companies

such as Toyota are implementing a lot of automotive equipment and require employees with the know-how to design, install and repair them.

"That kind of manufacturing is thriving in the U.S.," said Borman. "That's what we're teaching students here, there's going to be a big demand for that industry."

The school is one of the few high schools in the country that have industrial grade robotics equipment, Borman said. Many schools use smaller, educational robots.

The robotics course is just one path in the 21 career and technical education programs offered at the school. Programs include manufacturing, transportation, construction, health care, agriculture, communication, information technology and culinary arts among others.

Program areas are also tied to Indiana's "Hoosier Top 50 Jobs and Occupations" list. Evansville's largest employers, Berry Plastics, Alcoa, Toyota and Flanders Electric, are demanding workers with manufacturing skills.

Nearly 700 students enrolled this school year, all from Posey, Vanderburgh, Gibson, Warrick counties and the southern half of Spencer County. Saturday's open house attempted to attract even more.

"The biggest draw for the school is the courses are very relevant, hands-on and applied learning," said Principal Corey Herrin. "You can see why this learning is going to be used in that profession."

Herrin said a misconception about technical schools exists that ties them with the old idea of "your father's vocational school," where students learned a particular trade, got a job in that field, and pursued no postsecondary education.

In his mind, the term vocational school has a "Plan B" sound to it and is no longer used by him or his colleagues.

"Just because you're going to a career and technical school, does not mean you're not going to college," he said.

According to a pamphlet distributed at the open house, more than 65 percent of graduates of EVSC Career & Technical Education programs go on to pursue two-year and four-year postsecondary degrees. Others can find employment while still in high school or do an apprenticeship after graduation, Borman said.

Jessica Voyles, a junior at Bosse High School, heard from friends last year about the school and decided to see it for herself. They talked about how "open" they could be with their teachers and how willing the teachers are to work with them on everything.

"I'd learn better with a hands-on approach rather than sitting in class taking notes," she said.

Voyles wants to enroll in the animal science and veterinary program, which she feels will help her apply to the zoological medicine program at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. She hopes some day to work at the Indianapolis Zoo.

"Coming out here will give me the experience I need to get where I want in college," she said. "I'm pretty excited."



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