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NEWSPAPER IN EDUCATION

Experience counts but a degree gets the resume noticed

Manufacturing jobs have gotten scarce. So even though Michael Shaw has a good position as an electrician with U.S.T. Technology, he knows he needs to add to his 15 years of experience by earning an associate degree in industrial maintenance technology.

"More companies are looking at people that have the degree. I can tell them all day long, hey, I've wired PLC's, but when they look at resumes, they're still going to look at people with the associate degree first," Michael says.

Michael plans to stay with U.S.T. Technology, a company that he says is a great place to be challenged. "We do all interfacing with robotics and PLC's. So the window of learning here is unreal. You're constantly seeing something new with this company," he says.

Going back to school after nearly 15 years away wasn't easy. Michael and his wife have five children between them including a newborn, which can make studying a real challenge.

But, Michael says, the three oldest children who are in high school benefit from seeing him study. And since his math skills are now current, he can help them with algebra and trigonometry

homework.

Michael's supervisor is supportive of his decision to return to school. In fact, when a recent out-of-town assignment took longer to complete than expected, his boss sent someone to take Michael's place so he could get back to class.

"He wants me to learn all I can because in the end, it is going to benefit not just me, but the company as well," Michael says.

Industrial Maintenance Technology Department Head Jan Stenberg says the IMT associate degree, which Michael is pursuing, includes a valuable second year of study.

"This is an electronics concentration of study in automated manufacturing which covers AD/DC drives, sensors,



basic/advanced PLC operations, failure analysis via PLC troubleshooting and robotics," he says. "We also have a complete \$200,000 automated manufacturing, PLC-controlled

production machine that manufactures a product from setup, assembly and programmed storage."

First job comes just weeks after last class

At age 21, Josh Barton is finished with college, and a few weeks after he graduated, he landed a job with Draxlmaier making more money than he was



expecting. Needless to say, he's glad he chose the route he did: an associate degree in industrial maintenance technology from Greenville Tech.

Many of his high school classmates made different choices, some pursuing four-year degrees. "The jobs they're going to four-year colleges for are far and few," Josh says.

Josh chose his major based on an interest in electronics and an ability to fix things. An uncle who works in industrial maintenance recommended the field. Once he took the first few classes, Josh knew he'd found what he was looking for. He liked the hands-on method of learning and the instructors who held his interest.

To succeed in industrial maintenance, Josh says, you need to be able to perform critical thinking, often under pressure. "Let's say a sensor in a machine goes out," he explains. "You have 100 different sensors. You have to figure out which sensor it is. And until the machine's running again, the company's losing money."

Josh says his instructors helped him with his job search by providing valuable contacts and serving as references. Weeks after taking his last class, Josh has reached his goal: a good job in a growing field with a great salary.

Technician maintains his wits under pressures of the job

From the vantage point of a machine operator working at a large Upstate plant, Sammy Moody saw what his next step would be.

The plant couldn't function without maintenance technicians to keep the machinery up and running, and their pay reflected the level of demand.

So Sammy enrolled in Greenville Tech's two-year associate degree in industrial maintenance technology and soon qualified for a job in maintenance. Graduating this semester, he has plenty of options.

Always mechanically inclined,

Sammy found the classes to be fairly easy because they tied into his abilities, and he's earned a 4.0 grade point average. He's happy with the major he chose and the pay he can expect. "Salaries are good," he says. "It's probably one of the best two-year degrees you can get."

Sammy says one aspect of the job he enjoys is that each day is different. "It's hands-on, there's a lot to learn, it keeps you busy, and it's something different all the time. I love my job," he says.

It's important, Sammy says, to push yourself based on the demands of the situation. In a crisis, you have to be able to get a machine fixed as quickly as possible. In other scenarios, there's

more time to study the situation and come up with a solution.

In any case, crisis or routine maintenance, it's critical to ignore the pressure. "That's what makes a good

maintenance technician: being able to not be pressured by anybody," Sammy says. "You have to put all that in the back of your head, do what you have to do, and do it as quickly as possible. But you also have to make sure it's safe and it's done right so you don't have to come back in an hour and do it again."



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Points of Interest

• Careers

When production workers run into problems with the machines they operate, they call electromechanical industrial maintenance technicians with PLC experience.

These people are critical to an industry's success because they keep automated manufacturing production lines and/or associated machinery from being idle, they ensure the quality of the finished product, and they protect the safety of those operating the machinery.

The work begins with placement and installation of new machinery. Once the machinery is up and running, maintenance technicians must be able to detect and diagnose minor electrical/mechanical problems and correct them before they become major situations.

Preventive/predictive maintenance is also important in extending a machine's life and keeping machines in good working order.

• Money

Median hourly earnings of industrial machinery mechanics were \$18.26 in 2002 while general maintenance and repair workers earned a median hourly wage of \$15.63 in 2002.

• Forecast

Technological advancements in machinery including machines capable of self diagnosis are slowing the outlook in industrial maintenance. However, those who have broad skills in this field are expected to enjoy a continued favorable job market.

• On the Web

Learn more about this profession and others by checking out books, magazines and videotapes at your school or local library. The Internet is also a great resource. Look into these sites:

www.ntma.org

The National Tooling and Machining Association

www.pmpa.org

Precision Machined Products Association

www.agc.org

Associated General Contractors of America

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics



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