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## Custom-tailoring education to jump-start work force

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ORRVILLE - You have a company that's going 100 mph. You're planning a major facilities expansion ASAP. You're going to double your number of employees within the next year. But there doesn't seem to be enough people in the area with the particular set of skills required by your business.

What to do?

That is the dilemma faced by Techni Graphics Systems Inc. of Wooster, where business is booming and the only cloud is where to find enough skilled people to meet the growing needs of the enterprise.

The solution the company has come up with is to grow its own employees, with the help of the University of Akron Wayne College in Orrville. For the past year, the two organizations have been working together in a mutually beneficial arrangement under which the university is creating classes to develop the specific skills needed by Techni Graphics.

According to President Dee Vaidya, Techni Graphics is a software and "soft services" company whose forte is digitizing maps on a production-line basis.

Vaidya said the process aims at taking paper maps - which he views as "dumb" because of their one-dimension characteristics, and "providing them with smarts."

Smarts, according to Vaidya, means digitally "capturing point by point and line by line" all the information contained in a map, and separating it into computerized layers to extract all the information contained therein, and further enhancing it.

"We dismantle a map ... and build databases. We add to the richness of the data" so when a query is made to the database, the smart maps can yield a wealth of information, Vaidya said.

The layers of the smart maps can show everything from roads and rivers to longitude and latitude, elevations and vegetation. Specialized maps, such as those the company is developing for the U.S. Office of Homeland Security, can show the locations of all emergency facilities such as hospitals, police departments and fire stations, and provide detailed information about each one,

such as staffing and equipment inventory.

Salespeople dealing with businesses or industries could get maps showing exact locations of all businesses and industries in a given area, along with detailed information about each, including the names of contact people.

### Growing employees

To create this new generation of smart maps, Vaidya said the company is looking for “computer savvy people” who “need to be very comfortable with computers,” and understand databases, software and other basics.

To help develop qualified candidates for employment at Techni Graphics Systems, the company turned to Al Miller, its director of community relations, who contacted Jack Kristofco, dean of Wayne College, to see if an educational program could be created to prepare candidates specifically for employment with the company.

“We wanted to develop courses that would prepare (people) perfectly for us and give them the exactness we’re looking for,” said Miller. He said the company needs candidates with good basic computer skills that can be enhanced rapidly to enable them to “hit the ground running” with the company.

The courses Techni Graphics Systems asked Wayne College to bring together for potential candidates were surveying drafting, a geographical information systems data class and a software fundamentals course.

Miller said the courses could easily become a springboard to a two-year associate degree, and noted the program might be ideal for a displaced worker or a young worker with computer skills who hasn’t found a niche.

While Miller said completing the courses would be “a great qualifier” for a job with Techni Graphics, he said the company takes a variety of other factors into consideration with respect to employment. Miller said the company employs 72 people and plans to increase that number to 80 by the end of the year.

By next year, he said, the company is seeking to bring its employment to 160 after completing a new headquarters, for which it will break ground Oct. 7.

Kristofco said the partnership between Wayne College and Techni Graphics builds on the school’s ability to create custom-tailored education programs through its Office of Continuing Education and Workforce Development.

“What we do is listen to the management of a company, and then custom tailor an instruction package for their needs,” said Kristofco, noting courses can be taught either at Wayne College or at the business if there are adequate facilities.

In many cases, Kristofco noted, Wayne College can create a custom package of classes from programs it is already doing. With Techni Graphics, Kristofco said, it was necessary to develop “a particular skill set for roles in the company, ... and to create a pool of potential candidates to come to them.”

Those core classes, the dean said, could be matched with additional competencies to create a course that would result in a certificate. Kristofco said in a non-credit delivery mode such courses can be put together “relatively quickly.”

Kristofco called Wayne’s ability to create such courses “timely, given the population of transitional and displaced workers currently in the area, to whom this might appeal.”

He said “each individual engagement is unique,” and noted “the collaborations are stimulating and exciting” as the institution works “to enhance employability in the community. It benefits communities all around the area. That’s what’s exciting about it.”

Scott Simmons, resource and development director for Techni Graphics, said in addition to developing its own proprietary software, the company enhances commercial software.

Simmons said in addition to the infrastructure mapping it is now doing, it is working on nautical and foreign lands mapping, and will work on applications for mapping plots in cemeteries and doing applications for nursing homes.

“It’s evolving. I think it’s going to happen real fast, and we have to be ready for it,” Vaidya said.