“The technical colleges are going to be key for the manufacturing sector.”

Executive Interview: Terry Merck, Plant Manager, American Yazaki Corporation
Welcome to the Winter/Spring 2015 edition of Workforce Development Visions. This publication is developed by the Lanier Technical College Economic Development Division as another means of sharing best practices and insight from business leaders from across our service area.

The name of this publication comes naturally. Workforce development is the mission of Lanier Tech. We carry out this mission in three ways: our credit programs leading to a technical certificate, diploma, or associate degree; our adult education program leading to the high school equivalency diploma (GED); and the contract training and continuing education programs we offer through our Economic Development Division. In fiscal year 2014, Lanier Tech provided workforce development training opportunities to well over 26,000 people.

We also believe in the importance of vision. Vision is the ability to see the reality of where you are today, along with the picture of where you can be tomorrow. Vision allows us to see purpose. Vision allows us to see the direction we can go. Great things happen when people become focused on a clear vision.

In the 1960s, several local government and community leaders had a vision of a workforce development institute that would offer training that would be needed to meet the demands of the growing business and industry sector in and around Hall County. Lanier Technical College was born out of this vision and a partnership between the Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce, the City of Gainesville, the Hall County Board of Commissioners, the Hall County Board of Education, and the Gainesville City School System. Over the years, this vision has been expanded to include five campus locations strategically positioned throughout our seven county service area. As the College approaches its 50th anniversary, we are proud that the vision of Workforce Development remains at the core of our mission.

Lanier Technical College is honored to be designated as the 2014 Technical College of the Year. This is a great honor as the selection criterion is based on TCSG college performance in over 20 areas. A key criteria in the overall performance of Lanier Tech includes our Economic Development Division and the contract training that the College engages in with local businesses and industries.

As you read through our publication, we hope you will be inspired by the commitment to workforce development and the vision of our featured business leader. We hope you will turn to Lanier Technical College as you look to develop the workforce needed to implement your vision for your business.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ray Perren
The Advanced Manufacturing Training Center (AMTC)—a department of the Economic Development Division—located on the Oakwood, Georgia campus of Lanier Technical College is a truly unique training facility.

The AMTC is expertly staffed and equipped to deliver training in all electrical, mechanical, automation, robotics and process improvement areas needed by today’s manufacturing companies.

From rapid prototyping to robotic welding, the AMTC is ready with services to keep your manufacturing workforce and your manufacturing processes on the cutting edge of competition.

All courses are hands-on intensive, delivering skills training that is job-task oriented and process targeted.

Please visit www.laniertech.edu/amt or contact our staff at the Center with questions about training, employee improvement, or consultation programs:

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All AMTC training services are customizable, available 24 hours per day, 7 days / week, and GUARANTEED.
Please give us a little background on American Yazaki Corporation (AYC).

American Yazaki was created in November 2009. There were a number of actual factors that contributed to the creation of the company, including the economic downturn in 2008, which because of the difference between the dollar and yen rate, prompted American customers to pursue manufacturing outside of Japan. They were focusing on locating suppliers closer to their factory which has been a practice in Japan for many years. AYC started their first production with Yamaha in Newnan, GA for the multi-layered fuel tanks in the beginning of 2011. The fuel tanks met the CARB and EPA-required standards which were mandatory for plastic fuel tanks. Honda Power Equipment in Swepsonville, North Carolina became the next customer later that year which was an unexpected but very welcomed customer. In 2014, we acquired business with Ricoh in Lawrenceville, GA producing toner bottles. AYC has been able to achieve numerous quality awards from customers and has received the small business “Industry of the Year Award,” from the Chamber of Commerce (2013). AYC has gone three years without a lost time accident.

What led you to a career in manufacturing?

When I first started out in the working world, there were not that many different types of jobs in the Gainesville area as there are today. My first full-time job was in the textile industry. After studying Dr. W. Edwards Deming’s philosophy on manufacturing, I decided that I wanted to work for a Japanese company because they implemented his ideas of how to run their factories and had moved ahead of the USA in manufacturing because of this. Once I got the opportunity to move into a Japanese company that had located into Hall County, I went to work with them and have been working in that environment for the past 23 years.

What do you consider the greatest aspect of working for AYC?

One of the greatest aspects has been the rapid growth that we have experienced since we started in 2010. We have proven to our customers that we focus on customer satisfaction through zero defects and meeting their rapidly increasing production requirements. Our customers trust the quality of our work and know that our partnership will be long lasting.
We also are always looking for ways to improve the working environment for everyone so that they are excited about coming to work every day and they feel that they have a safe place to work.

**Can you share any new and innovative things that AYC is doing?**

AYC has been able to create an environment where employees are able to learn areas on the job that they thought were impossible for them to learn. As long as they have the desire to learn, we are willing to teach them.

We actually developed a unique pay scale matrix that rewards employees with higher pay when they achieve higher levels of knowledge of all jobs in the company.

We rotate our employees every two hours so that we don’t have issues with ergonomics and repetitive motion. It may take an employee a little longer to learn a new job, but in the long run, it is worth it for the employee and for the company. We stress safety every day to the employees, so they are always aware of their surroundings and they are looking for anything that might be unsafe. At the start of every shift, we discuss the “OSHA’s Fatalities and Catastrophes” report from the OSHA website.

There are workers dying every day on a job somewhere, and we bring that to everyone’s attention. We don’t want it to happen at AYC and that is why we make sure that they know about any circumstance that caused a fatality at other companies. It really brings it to reality when it is an actual event.

**What do you see as AYC’s greatest challenge or opportunity in the near future? The greatest challenge or opportunity for manufacturers in general?**

A huge opportunity will be finding good, qualified and dedicated workers to fill the positions in the future. We have seen a smaller percentage of the new generation of workers that are interested in the field of manufacturing. With this in mind, this will change the way manufacturing is done by utilizing the newest state-of-the-art technology. The new direction will be more toward computerized controls and robotics which is why the Technical Colleges are going to be key for the manufacturing sector.

Another challenge is the shortage of workers wanting to move into the maintenance field. We hear that companies are continually looking for maintenance personnel but are not being successful in locating good qualified people for this field. With the changes in the technology, this will create a different type of maintenance person who not only has the mechanical but also the technical skills.

**Can you give us some examples of how AYC invests in workforce development?**

We have taken workers and given them...
the opportunity to learn how to not only operate machinery, but also, how to do the maintenance on the equipment along with making adjustments to the equipment to bring the parts into spec if necessary. We have rewarded them for learning more jobs through our skill matrix tracking method that we developed for the jobs that we have throughout the plant. We are willing to train them on any job that they are willing to learn and show the ability to learn.

Lanier Tech’s Economic Development department has been very helpful with assisting AYC in not only training. Their expertise in electronics and troubleshooting has also been a great help to AYC. They are always willing to take time out of their schedule to assist the local manufacturing companies, and their energy and excitement in helping out is very transparent.

We, as manufacturers, are blessed to have the resources and the expertise that is available through Lanier Tech.

There have been many stories in the media related to a skills gap in manufacturing, has AYC experienced difficulty in attracting a talented workforce? If so, how is your company addressing this issue?

We have seen a huge gap in skilled workers for the manufacturing positions that we have. We have addressed this by having many of the repetitious jobs done by robots. This helps reduce the amount of workers needed to produce the high volume of production needed and also improves the quality of the product. We have had to take the approach of teaching technical skills to our workers, such as programming robot movements, and proving to them that as long as they have the desire, there is nothing that they can’t learn.

We pay all of our employees bonuses at the end of the year based on how the company is performing each year. We pay 90% of their health care insurance, which includes dental and vision.

What general advice would you give a young person who is looking to begin a career in manufacturing, either in the management side or technology side?

This can be a very rewarding career. If you have the desire to look for ways to make your job and product better every single day you will be very successful and be ahead of the game. Never be satisfied with the status quo and don’t take the attitude that, if it isn’t broken, don’t fix it. It can always be better!

You will always be ahead of your competitor if you are always trying to make it better than it currently is. Another important focus is learning problem-solving skills and how to utilize these skills with everything you do.

If a young person or a seasoned worker is interested in manufacturing or any other type of career, they should consider visiting their closest technical college and discuss with an instructor or administrator their options. They may not even be aware of what trades are available out in the manufacturing world. The technical colleges know what the companies are looking for and where there
Lanier Technical College plays a key role in helping businesses maintain a highly skilled and technically trained workforce. There is a shortage of workers. They can help them identify and develop a program for that individual.

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AYC employs 28 Team Members and is located at: 2735 Tumbling Creek Road Gainesville, GA 30504.

If you or your employees are looking for professional development opportunities, including easy-to-use online courses, Lanier Technical College offers a wide variety of high quality continuing education, training, and workshops in the College’s seven county service area. For more info please visit our Continuing Education website at:

www.laniertech.edu/ce

Need the flexibility of online education? Check out Lanier Technical College’s extensive, proven online continuing education courses that cover a wide variety of professional and personal growth.

www.laniertech.edu/ce/online.aspx

Contact Royce Glenn for any of Lanier Tech’s continuing education offerings.

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To further support the workforce development needs of a highly-skilled, professionally-trained workforce of the local businesses and industries, Lanier Technical College provides professional development in a variety of business critical areas.

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