

Agriculture Engineering Technology Program Begins in Troy

When Ranken West-Troy fully opens in August 2022, a new skilled career pathway will debut that advances industrial engineering technology skills into the field of agriculture. Called Agriculture Engineering Technology (AET), the two-year program addresses a growing demand for a skilled workforce in technologically advanced farming operations.

"We are connecting the modern farm to automation," says Dan Kania, Ranken's Vice President for Education. "The skills used in manufacturing and automation are the same as needed in the modern farming community and are in high demand."

Agriculture 4.0, a term used to describe the automation evolution within farming, has noted the growing use of robotics, software, temperature and moisture sensors, and drone and GPS technology by farming operations worldwide. The National Student Clearinghouse reports that Fall 2021 enrollment in ag-related career paths at two-year colleges jumped 40 percent from the previous year. That trend puts Ranken West-Troy as a leading institution in the region to train students in the burgeoning career field. Says Kania, "We must be on target with the skills needed for the new automated economy. This program is an example of that."

In addition to AET, Ranken West-Troy, which is a partnership between the college and the Lincoln County R-III School District, has programs in Advanced Precision Machining Technology and Carpentry. The overall goal is to introduce high school students to rewarding technical career paths and collaborate with the District to sync curriculum from the high school to the college level. That blend for AET began last fall, when Ranken AET chair Nicholas Crosse partnered with Rob Calvin, the agriculture department head at Troy Buchanan High School, to teach a dynamic, hands-on course in electrical automation, with equipment provided by Ranken. The college curriculum then offers a deep dive into mechanical, hydraulic, pneumatic, and electrical skills needed for automated agriculture. "We often hear from employers that students need to be equipped with comprehensive



Students at Troy Buchanan High School learn electrical automation technology as part of a collaborative effort between Ranken and the Lincoln County School District to entice students into Agriculture Engineering Technology careers.

knowledge of these technologies since many can be found in both traditional and modern farming operations," says Crosse. "Subsequent courses include an overview of wind and solar technologies as well as aquaponics and greenhouse growing operations. We also will have a course on drone technology and its uses in crop management, such as for yield estimation, draught assessments, and fertilizer efficacy."

Ranken has built a large aquaponics facility that will teach students how to grow and manage fish as livestock while also using the water as a medium for delivering nutrients to other crops, creating a 'loop-style' sustainable farm. It's an ideal project that could develop into a full business microenterprise, enabling students to be paid while learning. Students

ultimately will earn a certificate of technology or an associate degree in Agriculture Engineering Technology.

A huge draw for the AET program in Troy is the fact that the Lincoln County School District has the largest number of high schoolers in Missouri involved in Future Farmers of America (FFA). "We have 365 FFA members, which also makes us one of the 50 largest chapters in the Midwest," says Dr. Mary Saale, Director of Secondary Curriculum. "Ranken is helping us determine how we can better prepare our students for viable career paths through exemplary experiences, superior instruction, and trusting relationships. We aim to provide all students with an advantage upon graduation, and Ranken West-Troy moves us closer toward this vision." **R**



Built by students, Ranken's souped-up drift car takes the corner at World Wide Technology Raceway.

Watch Us Drift!

Have you been to World Wide Technology Raceway in Illinois lately? If so, you may have seen our 2004 Corvette Z06 in action. The Ranken-owned car, with a 765 HP engine built by students, is a definite attention-grabber in drift car racing and is emblazoned with the college's logo on the sides. Students in Automotive Maintenance, Automotive Collision Repair, High Performance Racing, Retro Tech, and Advanced Precision Machining as well as other Ranken students all helped to re-build and fabricate the car last summer to bring it up to racing standards. "We partnered with several companies to sponsor the car, but our students tore down and re-built the whole thing from the frame up, cutting the roof off, fabricating a roll cage, making fiberglass parts, building and tuning the engine, and many other projects over the course of several months," says Robert Callanan, Automotive Division Chair. "We have a semi-professional driver, Austin Blair, who drives it for us during Midnight Madness events at WWT Raceway and it's a huge draw there." Students also are the pit crew for the car during racing events. In addition to the Corvette, Ranken has plans for a custom-built '65 GTO, now in its automotive shop. "We've got several things in the works, including a

dirt car and a drag car," notes Callanan. "We have several instructors who are highly qualified in racing and motor sports, and they truly make it educational and embed it all into real experiences." **R**

In Person Summer Camps are Back

After a two-year hiatus due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Ranken is back with on-site Summer Adventure Academy camps. Ranken offered summer academies in three locations – St. Louis,



Woodworking was one of four Scout BSA Merit Badge Camps offered as part of Ranken's Summer Adventure Academies.



Two Ranken students enrolled in the Application and Web Development Technology Program were awarded a Silver Medal after competing at the 2022 National SkillsUSA competition held in Atlanta in June.

Wentzville, and Perryville. Programs ranged from Aviation Technology and Heavy Metal Fabrication to Website Design and Scratch Programming. Several robotics programs and a series of camps for boy scouts also were held. The camps are designed to get children excited about STEM careers. We thank Blueprint4SummerSTL, a program of the Clark-Fox Family Foundation, for funding scholarships for students to participate in our programs. **R**

National SkillsUSA Award!

Congratulations to Ranken students Joshua Mandel and Zackary Seger for bringing home a Silver Medal in Website Design and Development after competing in the SkillsUSA national championships held in Atlanta in late June. "It's the first time a national medal has been awarded to students in our Application and Web Development program," notes Evan Gudmestad, IT assistant division chair. To get to the national championships, Mandel and Seger came in First Place at the Missouri SkillsUSA state championship. "It was so motivating and inspiring to be around such incredibly talented students at the national competition," says Mandel. **R**

Building Confidence and Career Skills Through YouthBuild



YouthBuild participants Ashleigh and Domonick learn the basics of carpentry with Paublo Baca, a mentor and instructor in Ranken's Carpentry and Building Technology program.

In Ranken's Carpentry and Building Construction Technology Program, a handful of young adults are taking advantage of a unique city-college partnership in St. Louis to learn fundamental construction skills while also having the opportunity to earn their HiSET high school equivalency certification. Called YouthBuild, the initiative is one of several programs offered through the St. Louis Agency on Training and Employment (SLATE) to help at-risk and disadvantaged young adults ages 17 to 24 find fulfilling career paths. Now in its 8th year at Ranken, the program is focused on carpentry training and is based on the Core Certification Program of the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER).

"It's a 24-week program that focuses on developing construction math knowledge and hands-on, step-by-step carpentry skills," says Paublo Baca, Ranken's Carpentry and Building Construction Technology instructor for Ranken St. Louis and Ranken West-Troy.

Baca, a former construction educator at Bellingham Technical College in Washington state and construction manager for Habitat for Humanity in St. Charles, Mo., understands the need for both structure and support as he mentors students in the YouthBuild program. "I want these young adults to complete the program and leave here with a feeling of self-confidence and accomplishment," he says. "It is more than just skills training. It's

equipping them with the life and work skills to help them succeed."

Ranken provides carpentry instruction in its large, on-site building construction lab. Upstairs, educators from St. Louis Public Schools handle the educational component for youth to earn the HiSET. Individualized



Domonick keeps a close eye on his markings to ensure he makes an accurate cut during his YouthBuild carpentry class.

counseling and life skills training are offered by SLATE. "There are five core components of the program," notes Carlos Ball, SLATE's YouthBuild coordinator. "They include education, vocational training, supportive services (e.g. transportation), leadership and development skills, and then overall love and support. Once participants complete the program, we regularly touch base for another year to guide them toward jobs and address any barriers to employment and job retention."



Baca confirms that Ashleigh successfully completes a hands-on carpentry skills assignment.

Through SLATE, students apply to be accepted into the YouthBuild program. Barriers are challenging to overcome and include homelessness, unstable home life, poverty, and transportation issues. Marijuana use is another major challenge. Once enrolled, students are paid while they learn. They also receive significant tuition remission, which can help them move on to Ranken's full associate degree program in Carpentry and Building Construction Technology.

Ashleigh, 20, already is thinking ahead about her next career steps. "The Covid pandemic got me unmotivated with school, but now that I'm here and can see what skilled trades are all about, I want to continue at Ranken and get my degree," she says.

Baca and Ball work hard to keep youth in the program. An average of three out of every four students finish the course and earn their NCCER core certification. Says Baca, "They may or may not end up in construction, but our hope is that we have instilled in them the desire and confidence to find a rewarding career through Ranken." **R**

Scott Griffin, Automotive Collision Repair, 1992 Now: Founder, Griffin Automotive Design



Scott Griffin has quadrupled the size of his nationally recognized automotive repair, restoration and custom fabrication business since it was established in 2002.

Scott Griffin was drawn to cars at a very early age. The founder and general manager of Griffin Automotive Design in Bonne Terre, Mo., Griffin recalls the stash of Hot Wheels and the car models he built as a child as one of the earliest influences of his eventual career in automotive collision repair, metal fabrication, restoration, and full body design.

His principal influence, though, was his father, who loomed large in his childhood and shared a passion for car restoration. "My dad was a car enthusiast," Griffin recalls fondly. "I remember watching him work on an old Cadillac, that he eventually let me drive when I turned 16. I loved building and fixing cars myself and I bought my first Camaro when I was 12 years old and learned to do bodywork on that car."

As he grew older, Griffin knew he wanted to make a living working on cars. It was serendipity that a family friend told him about Ranken Technical College. "A friend of my parents happened to be an instructor at Ranken," he said. "He brought me a few old textbooks and it got me very interested. I checked out a few schools that were further away, but I was most impressed with what Ranken had to offer."

He enrolled in Ranken's Automotive Collision Repair Technology program and jumped into the hands-on training that was

offered. "You can only learn so much from watching others," Griffin says. "You have to get your hands dirty, make some mistakes, and figure it out a bit on your own. Ranken let you do that. I really liked how we learned in the classroom, and we were able to take that knowledge out into the shop and put it to use." Along the way, he participated and served as his class representative in Vocational Industrial Clubs of America (VICA) competitions, the national trade skill competitions that now are known as SkillsUSA. He credits those opportunities with developing leadership and business skills.

When he graduated from Ranken in 1992, Griffin scored a job at the first place he applied, Steve's Carstar in Arnold, Mo. He became a painter within the first year and was a journeyman tech within two years of graduation. He then moved to work for a local dealership. Still, the early passion of restoring and building cars never left him. "I was building cars on the side for a little while and I was into automotive racing and custom cars," he says. "I decided to venture out and take it full time and start my own shop."

Griffin started in a small, 1,600-square-foot shop. His attention to detail as well as creative custom auto design brought in customers from across the country. Today, Griffin Automotive Design employs 30 people

and has 54 work bays. Its footprint has grown to 35,000 square feet. Griffin has plans for even more expansion due to increased demand for his company's services. He proudly says, "I've had the pleasure of building cars for professional athletes, business professionals, and entrepreneurs. Our custom cars are displayed at large events all over the country and across the globe."

Does he have a favorite build? With the large variety of requests, Griffin says, "The most important ones were probably the cars and trucks I got to build with my dad when I was first starting out. I still have a truck I built for him when I was about 20 years old. I have since built cars over the half-million-dollar mark. I get to constantly evolve and change things with each new build, so it is always fresh and new."



Griffin Automotive Design was founded by Ranken alumnus Scott Griffin.

About his time at Ranken, Griffin says emphatically that Ranken not only taught him the skills he needed to fix and restore cars, but his instructors also stressed work ethic and the leadership and business side of the business. That added to his confidence when he stepped out on his own 10 years after earning his degree.

"I recommend Ranken to a lot of young people interested in the industry," he says. "I also recommend the industry to a lot of young people because it's not only financially rewarding, but also mentally rewarding. It has been very good fit for me. When you do a job right, you take pride in that. I can't imagine doing anything else."

Learn more about Griffin's business at www.griffinautomotivedesign.com. **R**

THANKS TO **YOU!**

Spotlight on: Witte Bros. Exchange

Three weeks into her paid internship at Witte Bros. Exchange in Troy, Mo., Ashley Hessling has moved from “all things tires” to learning how to make frame repairs on large tractor trailers. She rotates through Witte Bros. every eight weeks as part of her coursework in Ranken West-Wentzville’s diesel technology program. “It’s been pretty cool to work in a real shop and get paid,” she says. “I’ve wanted to be a diesel mechanic for a long time, and this has been great so far.”



Ranken Intern Ashley Hessling.

Witte Bros. is a passionate industry supporter of Ranken Technical College and its hands-on training opportunities to develop skilled workers. “We’ve been part of the embedded diesel internship program since Ranken started that two years ago,” says company president Brent Witte. “Our goal is to hire our interns if they are a good fit and then let them grow in our business.”

Witte Bros. is a family-owned company founded in 1946 when the family’s patriarch, Clem Witte, bought a tractor-trailer to haul cattle from Arkansas back to his farm in Troy. As his sons took over the business, the company grew to include warehouse, distribution, and long-haul trucking services. They also started a feed supply business for area farmers that included custom-made feed crafted by a certified nutritionist. In the 1990s, the company expanded its offerings to include cold-storage warehousing and



Ranken Alum Brandon Schulte gives an engine repair update to Brent Witte, president of Witte Bros. Exchange.

distribution as well as a profitable – and popular – refrigerated less-than-truckload (LTL) program. Today, the company has more than 300 employees and 200 truck drivers. It maintains a fleet of 220 trucks and 350 trailers as well as a large cold storage facility at its 80-acre headquarters.

“We’ve grown 30 percent in just the last five years,” says Witte. “We have our own CDL training school for truck drivers and offer guaranteed jobs upon completion of the program. We’re working with Ranken now to increase our diesel maintenance team and we really like the mandatory work ethic component of their curriculum because it fits well with our own mission.”

Witte learned about Ranken’s diesel program when he was part of a Troy business group tour after the college formed a partnership with the Lincoln County School District and community leaders to open Ranken West-Troy. That location fully opens in August, offering carpentry and building construction, advanced precision machining, and agriculture engineering technology programs. “I really wanted to get involved and offer support when I learned about the diesel program in Wentzville.”

He donated to the Ranken West Endowed Scholarship Fund and followed that up with a generous five-year pledge to support the diesel technology program. Soon after, he jumped in to participate in the rotating paid internships. “We start interns out in tires because every good maintenance program starts with good tire management,” he says. “Then we have them work on the trailer side, which includes refrigeration as well as body repair, and finally, truck engines. The goal is to give them a wide range of experiences during their time with us.”

Ranken graduate Brandon Schulte has been with Witte Bros. since 2018. He works on Peterbilt and Freightliner trucks and tackles repairs to the company’s large farm equipment. “Even before they had the internship program, I was working here while I was a student,” Schulte says. “I’m glad I got my associate degree at Ranken because all of the hands-on training prepared me to step right into this workforce when I graduated.”

Says Witte, “I’ve been impressed with Ranken’s approach to education and how they bring out the best in their students. It goes beyond education and into the development of the whole person. I’m proud to support the college and I’m eager to help train more students to enter the workforce.” **R**



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Upcoming Events:

September 2022

Friday, September 2- Ranken Experience (St. Louis location)
Friday, September 9- Ranken Experience (Southeast location)
Thursday, September 15- Ranken Experience (West location)

October 2022

Thursday, October 6- Job Fair (Southeast location-IT only)
Thursday, October 13- Job Fair (St. Louis location)
Tuesday, October 18- Discover Ranken Day (Southeast location)
Saturday, October 22- Discover Ranken Day (St. Louis location)

November 2022

Thursday, November 3- Job Fair (West location)
Friday, November 4- Ranken Experience (St. Louis location)
Saturday, November 5- Discover Ranken Day (West location)
Friday, November 18- Ranken Experience (Southeast location)



Honoring Our Alumni:

In addition to **873 students** who graduated from Ranken for the 2021-22 Commencement year, **16 Golden Graduates** from the classes of 1970, 1971 and 1972 also were honored during the commencement ceremony.

*We are always proud of our alumni.
Stay in touch!*