

RANKEN

TECHNICAL COLLEGE

2023-2024 IMPACT REPORT



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PARTNERSHIPS



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AIRFRAME AND POWER

Ranken students are used to working on powerful equipment: fast cars, machines that cut steel into complex parts, and trucks that pull heavy loads. Ranken students have the technical skills to keep the engines of our economy moving. Soon, they will keep planes flying!



Last year, the City of Perryville, Missouri asked Ranken to consider establishing an Airframe and Power Aviation Maintenance Education Program (A&P) at the Perryville Regional Airport. The airport is owned by the city and has one major tenant, West Star Aviation, a leader in aviation maintenance and repair who has been operating at the facility since 2018. West Star repairs, modifies, and refurbishes planes for businesses and individuals. Some of their customers include musicians,

athletes, and celebrities.

Brent Buerck, City Administrator of Perryville works closely with elected officials and community leaders to promote and grow the city economically. Having worked with Ranken over the past decade helping to facilitate Ranken's partnerships with major companies that include TG Missouri and Gilster-Mary Lee, Buerck knows Ranken's ability to create customized education and training solutions that benefit industry, while creating





AIRFRAME AND POWER CONTINUED

exceptional educational opportunities for students. Buerck and other community leaders recognized that Perryville’s airport could spur greater economic growth for the community and West Star Aviation. To do so, they needed more trained and licensed A&P technicians. Buerck saw the opportunity to connect Ranken and West Star to explore this new partnership.

The Need

Civil aviation in the United States represents \$1.37 trillion dollars annually and employs more than 10 million people throughout the industry. Like most technical trades, the number of job openings continues to grow as the industry expands and the current workforce continues to age. The United States Bureau of Labor projects overall employment for aircraft and avionics technicians to grow by 12,800 jobs annually.

Perryville has had a long aviation history, but the city was hit hard when Sabreliner, a company that built and refurbished jets for 50 years in Perryville pulled out of the airport, leaving 210,000 square feet of empty space and the longest runway between St. Louis and Memphis idled. To fill the void, Buerck worked hard to court West Star to move to the airport and utilize the established and skilled workforce.

“We are back to a thriving airport and industry but now we have to make sure we can support it going forward,” Buerck explained. “We’ve had an existing relationship with Ranken since 2017 and we trust their model and staff. We saw how good Ranken was at delivering workforce training so we started looking at other ways Ranken could help Perryville. For this program, they put together a team to get it done and I believe they will do it better than anyone else.”

For companies like West Star, the need for highly trained technicians is critical for their success. Like most companies in the industry, West Star has numerous open positions that dramatically impact their ability to serve a growing list of customers. This challenge is made even more difficult as the industry is regulated by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) with very strict and specific regulations, including the requirement that all airframe and power technicians be licensed by the FAA.

Building Momentum

Modern education, especially technical education can be a costly undertaking. Starting an airframe and power program is no exception,

with the cost of tools, airplane hangar space, and airplanes, especially when you are ensuring that students are trained on the latest technology. To establish a new airframe and power program, Ranken would need financial support that came by way of valued partners including the City of Perryville and the Perry County Economic Development Authority.

With the support of the City and the Perry County Economic Development Authority, Ranken successfully applied for a \$450,000 grant from the Delta Regional Authority (DRA), a joint federal-state collaboration that promotes and encourages economic development in the lower Mississippi river and other states in the region. The DRA invests in projects that support transportation and basic infrastructure, workforce training, and business development that creates jobs and build stronger communities.

Andy Robinson, Dean of Academic Affairs who is heading up the A&P Program for Ranken expresses the gratitude of the College by saying, “The most important piece when building a program from the ground up is getting stakeholder buy-in. Having support from Delta Regional Authority will help create the curriculum and support the buildout of the hangar and training areas.”

The City of Perryville is also providing financial support by investing \$15 million in airport renovations that include repaving the 7,000-foot runway and even installing the first electric airplane charger in Missouri. In addition to funding, Buerck also brought West Star to the partnership, providing an essential industry component and the opportunity for Ranken students to gain invaluable hands-on experience. “Perryville was the ideal location for this airframe and power program because they had the right space and the support of West Star,” affirmed Robinson. “They have two maintenance hangars that fit significant sized airplanes and with the help of the City of Perryville, the hangar will be remodeled and will include a classroom.” In addition, Perryville is donating a jet airplane which Robinson refers to as “a living lab for students,” as the plane is a training model that will be part of teaching students more than 500 competencies required for their licensure.

The participation of West Star is the linchpin of the project. Like Ranken’s Diesel Technology program’s partnership with Gilster-Mary Lee, West Star will expose faculty and students to a live shop. This type of program is heralded by Ranken President Don Pohl, “We believe that students learn technical skills by doing, and there’s no better way to learn than by working in a live shop doing





We build and foster relationships with city leadership and dive deep on what their needs are, listen and figure out how their needs fit our recipe for success.”

**ANDY ROBINSON,
DEAN OF ACADEMIC AFFAIRS**



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AIRFRAME AND POWER CONTINUED

real work. It's exciting that our students will be gaining real-world work experience in an industry that's exploding with opportunity. This is the type of program that will benefit our students, West Star, and the surrounding community."

Community Impact

For West Star in Perryville, the new partnership is a classic "win/win" where West Star will benefit through increased production and capacity, while also helping to train the next generation of airframe and power technicians. This fact is not lost on Dean Robinson, "Students will receive training and education that will lead to good-paying jobs. As West Star grows, more jobs are added, which leads to greater economic development for the entire Perryville community and the Southeastern Missouri region."

Starting an airframe and power program from scratch is no small task. As the program is highly regulated and operates under the authority of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Ranken must go through a very comprehensive application and review process before being able to begin teaching classes. While Perryville was considering the project, there was one clear choice for an educational partner. Ranken. "Having a school like Ranken that can deliver students qualified to work on this cutting-edge technology will be incredible for us," commented Buerck. "Ranken has the ability to move at the speed of business. If a business needs a particular

training, Ranken is just a phone call away – their accessibility and ability to deliver is what separates them from other organizations."

By developing the A&P program, Ranken is capitalizing on its strong experience creating successful, leading-edge technical education programs. Dean Robinson has extensive experience in developing and launching new academic programs and is driving the airframe and power program. Robinson is excited and optimistic about the future for the new program and the Perryville region. "The economic vitality of our communities resides in the quality of education. I've enjoyed getting to know the people of Perryville and the level of support we are receiving from the region and the City of Perryville has been incredible."

Ready for Takeoff

This October, Ranken cleared the first hurdle to receiving approval for their FAA 147 license to establish the program. With the FAA's initial approval, Ranken is moving full speed ahead in the development of the academic curriculum with a goal to begin in 2025.

President Pohl sums up the program saying, "For more than 117 years, Ranken has been the first choice of students seeking a technical education, and we are also the first choice of corporate and community partners. This partnership really demonstrates our strength as a college to meet the needs of industry while changing the lives of students through technical education." **R**





BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS TO BENEFIT STUDENTS AND INDUSTRY

Ranken Technical College continues to expand throughout the regions to offer new opportunities to students as well as employers. Ranken has created a model of successful partnership with communities and industries.



Steve Pankey, Director of Satellite Locations at Ranken explained that “While each location offers education and training in a variety of technical disciplines, they all overlap with hands-on training for the most in-demand careers partnered with strong employer relationships.”
“The common thread at each location is that we’re working with local employers and developing curriculum to meet their specific needs. While our

main campus is in St. Louis, we listen to industry in each area of Missouri about their unique needs. In our conversations with employers, chambers of commerce, and economic development groups, we ask them what’s missing, what do they need to grow, and how we can support their needs for new and current employees. When employers ask us to develop a new technical curriculum, we say yes.”





BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS CONTINUED

Real-World Experiences

When developing programs and curriculum, Ranken leans on their Industry Advisory Boards that keep faculty abreast of changes in the workforce and ensure the college remains current and forward-thinking. The majority of Ranken faculty are still engaged in the workforce, which brings real-world experience to student education.

Ranken’s partnership with industry opens doors for traditional students. “We’re able to put students on a dedicated path, provide them with technical education and skills, and help them get an internship with one of our partners,” Pankey says. “Internships are like an extended paid job interview where students learn skills and gain confidence while also proving themselves and showing their work ethic.”

Hands-on training is a core part of Ranken’s mission, says Ranken President Don Pohl. “We’re using real-world work experiences and comprehensive training to prepare students,” Pohl explains. “But none of this is possible without the strong relationships we have with industry. We listen closely to industry about how we should be teaching, and what we should be teaching, to remain on the cutting edge of new technology and new skill sets that are constantly changing.”

Pohl continues: “The only way we benefit our students is by also benefitting industry. As a result, our students are getting the best hands-on experiences and preparation so we’re able to change the lives of students each and every day.”

Workforce Development Training

To meet the growing demand, Ranken Technical College also offers tailored workforce development training to various industries.

Keyvan Gerami, Dean of Continuing Education and Workforce Development at Ranken, says workforce development training grew 20% last year and is on track to grow 30% in 2024. “Companies are realizing they need to retrain employees as technology changes,” Gerami says. “We offer custom hands-on and refresher training based on employers’ specific needs.”

Ranken offers evening programs at various centers as well as custom workforce training onsite. For example, Ranken instructors teach welding programs and hydraulic classes twice a week at General Motors. This year, Ranken instructors have provided robotics training for Missouri Smelting Technology, Inc. (MOST), in Memphis, Tennessee. “It’s an expanding area for Ranken,” Gerami says. “We offer customized classes that we create with our customers—they are not just classes off the shelf. We go above and beyond and will tap into our professional network of resources to meet the customer’s unique needs.”



We’ve been experts in providing technical and trade education since 1907 and we have the knowledge base and experience to work with every type of industry,”

**DON POHL,
RANKEN PRESIDENT**



In Ashland, employers are looking for welding fabricators to learn vertical and overhead welding with a goal of earning an American Welding Society certification. “Companies wanted their employees to understand how to maintain welders and learn to check and replace filters, wires, and hoses,” Pankey says. “When their employees go through our training programs, the companies have the confidence that their employees will gain the specific skills they asked for.”

Customized Training Brings ROI

Over the past few years, Ranken has partnered with companies and governmental agencies to provide Ranken’s Workforce Development Program for training including Missouri’s Facilities Management Design and Construction (FMDC). Ranken’s Industrial Maintenance Technical Department created a high/low voltage safety training for FMDC crews throughout the state. This training is now being used by other companies as well. As a result of the successful trainings, Ranken and FMDC have expanded the partnership to include trainings in air conditioning/EPA 608 certifications, variable frequency drives, and indoor/outdoor painting.

“FMDC management is very happy with the classes, and how impactful it has been for members of their team,” says Gerami. “By working with Ranken to develop these customized training programs, FMDC is building a greater sense of teamwork for their new and established staff members, increasing their value to the company, while recognizing each member’s diverse talents, skills, and contributions.”

Nearly 140 FMDC employees have gone through workforce training from the six regions the organization manages across the state. This has enhanced each individual’s skillset and provided growth in their industry.

Another Ranken training partner, Hitachi Energy, with a hub in Jefferson City, is a global leader in advancing sustainable energy. This year Ranken has provided hydraulic training to all three shifts of Hitachi employees. Based on the positive outcome from the training, Hitachi has asked Ranken to also provide electrical training to all of their employees.

“We’ve been experts in providing technical and trade education since 1907 and we have the knowledge base and experience to work with every type of industry,” Don Pohl, Ranken President explains. “We bring value by listening to what industry wants and then determining the best way to deliver that education. This customized training brings a significant return on investment. It’s true competency-based education. That’s the future.” **R**





MEET WINGXPAND

A SHARED MISSION SOARS HIGHER

Michelle Madaras was a TV news reporter 10 years ago, when the news team frequently used drones for visuals of floods, fires, tornadoes, farm fields during droughts, construction sites and more. But the technology left much to be desired.

Madaras says, “My colleagues and I would commiserate that the drones only had 30 minutes of flight time max, shoddy camera feeds, and unreliable connectivity that made it difficult to command and control the drone. It wasn’t meeting our needs as a professional tool to get the video we needed, much less for first responders who needed it to potentially save a life.”

“We developed this portable smart plane for both commercial and military use,” Madaras says. “It fits in a backpack and can be clicked together to a full 8-foot wingspan in under 2 minutes.”

The smart plane, with built-in AI software, is used for perimeter security, early wildfire detection, and detection of threat vehicles, among other uses.



Madaras recognized the need for better drone technology for commercial use.

This practical, commercial need combined with James Barbieri’s aerospace engineering and a defense background sparked a groundbreaking idea for an 8-foot smart plane with expanding wing technology.

Building on both of their experiences, Michelle and James (who are now married) co-founded WingXpand in 2022 and are the President and CEO, respectively. WingXpand was inducted into TechStars’ Space Accelerator program, a highly competitive program that only admits the top 5% of global startups. The program is sponsored by U.S. Space Force and the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

Collaborating Outside the Box

WingXpand grew exponentially in its first year and quickly needed additional space. Recognizing Ranken Technical College’s leadership in hands-on training in traditional and emerging industries and having the need for a skilled workforce, Michelle and James found a new home in the Robert W. Plaster Free Enterprise Center, an incubator and training facility, on Ranken’s St. Louis campus. The Enterprise Center opened in early 2020.



The collaboration provides drone manufacturing space as well as training for students.

When Michelle and James met with Don Pohl, Ranken President, he walked them through the facility and shared his passion for the college's mission of hands-on experiences for students.

"I was impressed by the different ways Ranken thinks outside the box," Madaras says. "We share a number of synergies. We want to hire local people, grow talent pools, and manufacture in the U.S. We're passionate about that and Ranken shares that mission, so we saw good collaboration opportunities and we both decided to lean forward and make this possible. We're really grateful for that. It's been a wonderful journey ever since."

Collaborating with WingXpand came down to saying 'yes,' then figuring out 'how'. Pohl says "Ranken is always focused on finding a plausible solution and discovering what makes sense for the partners we work with through workforce training. WingXpand is doing cutting-edge things. They need a technological workforce and Ranken can supply them with that. Our goal is to bring a return on investment to our collaborators in workforce training and we've achieved that with WingXpand."

WingXpand's head of manufacturing in St. Louis is a Ranken graduate. In addition to training students, WingXpand also hires Ranken interns.

Hands-On Experience in Advanced Technology

WingXpand designed and built their showcase 8-foot smart plane using a "best in breed" approach combining 3-D printing, aerospace manufacturing, and automotive manufacturing. "We're giving students an opportunity to work in our shop where they're learning novel, advanced manufacturing methods and exploring new ways to survey agriculture and inspect construction using drones," Madaras says. "Drones will be a new tool in many different industries. Students who work with us are getting hands-on experiences with the latest technology and learning new manufacturing processes that will really shape industries in the future."

She continues: "These experiences have opened the students' eyes to what's out there for them, which makes them more competitive in the market, and exposes them to new methodologies of manufacturing that they wouldn't have known."

Building Talent for America

WingXpand benefits from being headquartered in the Midwest where the cost of living is low, with a strong source of talent. WingXpand is also situated in the heart of aerospace manufacturing, which has been vital to the company's accomplishments.



"I was impressed by the different ways Ranken thinks outside the box, We have a lot of synergies. We want to hire local people, grow talent pools, and manufacture in the U.S. We're passionate about that and Ranken shares that mission."

**MICHELLE MADARAS,
WINGXPAND PRESIDENT**

The collaboration between WingXpand and Ranken benefits the community and region.

"We're growing talent right here in the region, which helps the local community," Madras says. "These are high-quality jobs that come with a good paycheck. It's what the backbone of America was built on. Entrepreneurship, innovations, making things in America, and securing the supply chain is what makes our democracy so vibrant."

WingXpand continues to grow and develop innovative products, receiving numerous awards and accolades. Recently, WingXpand was a winner of the US Army's Special Operations xTech competition for their cutting-edge drone technology. They were also awarded "Most Innovative Technology" at the Natural Disaster Show and won two other U.S. Army top innovation contests. **R**





RANKEN ALUMNI

“DOC” AND JOEY

In May 2024 Joey Papa, Class of 2024, proudly stood side by side with Gary “Doc” Jones, Class of 1962, in their caps and gowns at the Ranken Technical College graduation ceremony. Jones, a Golden Graduate celebrating his 50+ year anniversary as a Ranken alum, surprised his grandson Joey Papa at the ceremony. They share educational roots through Ranken, professional roots in Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC), and family roots. Papa now works as an installer, learning the ropes in the family business, Air Comfort Service, which Jones started in 1969 at age 30.



and a keen eye on the future... Jones enrolled in the HVAC program at Ranken.

“Ranken was the place to go for trades,” Jones says. “HVAC was a new field back then. My professor was an engineer. So he would hang a thermometer from the 15-foot tall classroom ceiling and teach us about how heat rises. In the long run, if you understand theory, then you know how things should work so you can troubleshoot.”

Jones graduated from Ranken in 1964 and hit the ground running. He worked for a furnace company for three years, while simultaneously keeping pace with the constant changes, requirements, and codes for the burgeoning HVAC industry. He worked as an estimator, making sure safety protocols were followed and in place before landing the job as a service technician at the company he would eventually own.

The culmination of the education he received in the Navy, at Ranken, and his work experience at his first jobs in the industry laid the groundwork for him to become a successful business owner of an HVAC company that continues to grow 55 years later: Air Comfort Service.

Teaching the Next Generation

Air Comfort Service hires Ranken graduates “...because they receive the best training around.” Says Jones, whose company looks for mechanical ability, a good work ethic, interpersonal skills interacting with customers, and problem solving, and the ability to apply knowledge.

“Ranken does a good job teaching all those items,” Jones says. “Ranken grads are just more polished and able to complete tasks given to them without much supervision. We not only hire Ranken grads, but we send other people to be trained at Ranken.”

Jones’ grandson, Joey Papa, is one of those well-trained Ranken graduates who earned a place at Air Comfort Service with an education in HVAC.

“Joey was always mechanically inclined,” Jones says.

The Entrepreneurial Spirit

Gary Jones always had an entrepreneurial spirit. He joined the Navy fresh out of high school in 1960, followed by nine months of intensive training so he could teach navigational flying to others in the service.

As Jones considered his career options after the Navy, he was drawn to Ranken. He talked with a high school friend who graduated from Ranken and was successful in the automotive trade. He also spoke with another friend who was in the newly growing “air conditioning” industry.

It was air conditioning that piqued his interest.

“It was interesting to me, because back in 1962, no one had air conditioning,” Jones says. Building on his knowledge from the Navy, conversations with tradesmen,



“Even when he was young, my advice to him was to take broken things apart and see what’s inside. If you can fix it—good; if not, then throw it away.”

Joey Papa knew from a young age he wanted to go into HVAC. “In high school, I liked working with my hands from working with my grandpa,” said Papa. “He always told me if I wanted to learn a trade, to learn HVAC first because you learn a little about everything and then you can branch out later if you want to.”

Ranken was on his radar because his grandpa had gone to school there. But once he toured the school, he was sold. “I was surprised to see how much equipment they have with different things to learn and work on.”

Jones agrees. Although he graduated 50-plus years ago, he has visited Ranken regularly as a member of the Rotary Club. He’s always impressed. “I was blown away, especially by the automotive department. They get donated cars and all the equipment. It’s amazing.”

Happily Handing Over the Keys

After decades of working at least 70 to 80 hours a week, Jones finally retired in 2005, but he couldn’t do it cold turkey. He phased out gradually, and now considers himself an ‘overseer,’ at age 85. He is proud of the achievements of his son-in-law, who is Joey’s father, and now runs the business.

“He has tripled the business since I left,” Jones says. “We have about 80 employees with seven different services.”

Joey Papa is excited to join the family business and feels well-prepared because of his Ranken education and his experience working for a summer in HVAC at Air Comfort Service. “I was a little nervous at first, but everyone was really nice, and I couldn’t ask for better people to work with.”

“From the beginning, we made sure there was no favoritism, so we ran Joey through the same path as everyone else with no short cuts,” Jones emphasizes.

Papa appreciates the learning opportunities. “I’m going to be doing installs as a starting point to learn how equipment is meant to work when it’s new, so you know how to fix it when it’s broken,” he says. “Knowing that my grandpa started this company 55 years ago and how much he has grown it is pretty cool.”

Gary Jones worked long hours building his business, but he would not do anything differently. **R**



I loved this business so much that I couldn’t wait to get to work the next day even if I had worked for 15 hours the day before. I had a great time. It wasn’t work, it was fun.”

**GARY “DOC” JONES,
AIR COMFORT SERVICE**



HOW DID GARY GET THE NAME DOC JONES?

Jones got the name from St. Louis KMOX radio announcer, Jim White, aka “The Big Bumper,” in the 1970’s. Jones says HVAC dealers were encouraged to come up with ad slogans that made them memorable. Since he was nicknamed Bones as a skinny high schooler, White came up with the slogan “Let Doc Jones Comfort Your Bones.” The slogan stuck for more than 30 years and was listed as one of the top 10 sayings by the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.



RANKEN HELPS POWER A BRIGHTER FUTURE

When Darren Kuhn was growing up, his dad would let him take apart broken computers and put them back together again. “I had a natural curiosity and he let me go at it—sometimes I could even get them to work again,” Kuhn says. “It really sparked my interest in electrical work.”

That light was dimmed during Darren’s high school years where he faced significant hurdles including being homeless his junior and senior year. “I was moving from couch to couch, and I sometimes lived with my aunt,” he explains.

Darren was determined to carve out a brighter, more secure, and more fulfilling future. His older brother, Hakim Gibson, graduated from the electrical program at Ranken Technical College and gave him an inspirational path to follow.

A Life-Changing Gift

To get him on more solid footing, Darren received an Alumni scholarship to Ranken. In addition, he received a dorm scholarship so he could live on campus. This was a life-changing gift for the once homeless student.

“I didn’t have a car so living on campus made it easier for me to get to class,” Kuhn says. “I also liked being able to go lay down in my own bed after class and not be in someone’s way on a couch. It was really relaxing.”

But Darren isn’t one to stay idle for long.

His work ethic, a hallmark of Ranken students, is setting him up for success.

Now in his second year at Ranken, he works a 40-hour week, from 6:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. each day, as an electrical contractor. He then goes to class two nights a week from 6 to 9 p.m. It’s a challenging schedule but Darren is undaunted.



“I like working,” he says.

He saved up his money from his first electrical job and can now afford his own apartment off campus. He also enjoys having his own bed. His first roommate at Ranken is now living with him at his new apartment, too.

Ranken President Don Pohl is grateful to the donors who gave Darren the opportunity to become independent with a bright future. “Philanthropy is important to help students get started,” he says. “It’s our job to ensure students can create a life that is self-sustainable. And that’s the real win for Darren. He came from an unstable living situation and is now able to afford his own apartment... and when he graduates, he will start a great career. Darren is a wonderful success story.”

Making Dreams a Reality

Darren appreciates the support he received from day one at Ranken that has guided him on his successful path.

“Ranken helped me see what I could do,” Kuhn says. “I really love the environment Ranken has brought to me especially since I had a rough time before I attended here. I want to thank the people who gave me my scholarship. I don’t know where I would be without it.”

Darren will graduate from Ranken in May 2025, and he already has his sights set on his next goal. “I want to go back to school at Ranken for welding,” he says. “I want to be the one to build the big equipment in factories.” **R**





LEADERSHIP / FINANCIALS

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FINANCIALS: STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES JUNE 30, 2024

Tuition (net)	\$24,333,134
Investment Income	\$8,307,509
Contributions	\$1,878,589
Auxiliary Income	\$3,730,750
Other Income	\$8,949,702
Total Revenue	\$47,199,684

Instruction	\$10,830,258
Academic Support	\$1,183,921
Institutional Support & Student Services	\$19,162,811
Fund Raising	\$275,917
Operation of Maintenance of Plant	\$5,059,026
Auxiliary Expenses	\$2,708,349
Pension	\$5,033,774
Total Expenditures	\$34,186,508



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