

# RANKEN

TECHNICAL COLLEGE

2024-2025 IMPACT REPORT



**CONNECTING EDUCATION AND  
THE FUTURE OF WORK**





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# New Manufacturing Projects Offer Opportunities to Deploy New Technology

Automation has been mankind's 4,000-year pursuit to make things faster, better, safer, and less expensive. While automation has dramatically changed the way we work, there have been concerns that machines and computers will make many jobs irrelevant, reducing employment.



**At Ranken Technical College, we view automation as an opportunity, because every machine and automated process needs a Ranken-trained professional to ensure it is running as efficiently as possible!** Ranken alumni and workforce development trainees are represented in every manufacturing sector in our region. From crafting components for jets and military equipment, to making food for people and pets, providing clean water, or ensuring the lights and heat stay on, there is a Ranken graduate making sure the automated processes are working.

Holding fast to a core tenant of being industry-centric, Ranken is always working to ensure our students have the knowledge and skills to meet the needs of industry. We asked two industrial partners, Tri Tech Automation and Toyoda Gosei (TG) Missouri to pull back the curtain of their industry, to show how they are currently using automation, and their vision of automation applications over the next decade so that Ranken can prepare students with the knowledge and technical skills to meet the needs of industry.

## Tri Tech Automation

Luke Manier, Managing Director at Tri Tech says, “We help manufacturing companies reach their fullest potential by leveraging industrial automation solutions, perfecting American manufacturing.”

**Tri Tech recently developed the automation systems for a new \$1 billion cheese factory in Iowa, with Christian Lodike, a 2021 Ranken Electrical Automation graduate as the Lead Controls Engineer.** This “greenfield” project constructed a new cheese manufacturing plant near the dairy farmers who produce the eight million pounds of milk used each day to produce cheddar and Monterey Jack cheese.

The new plant gave Tri Tech a blank canvas to design the system as well as the Human Machine Interface (HMI) that plant operators use to run the complex process of inputting milk, separating byproducts such as whey from the end product, an 80-pound block of cheese.

Tri Tech’s role included providing everything that “turns on” including pumps, valves, fans, the motor control equipment, etc. and providing all the process instrumentation including level and temperature sensors, flow sensors, and valves. As Christian describes it, he was “. . . designing the automation system that sits over the entire production.”

In addition to designing the system, Christian developed the programming standards to facilitate how the company wants to interact with the process and collecting all the information they need to maximize efficiency. Since this is a food production process, Christian also needed to follow Food and Drug Administration (FDA) standards that included managing a cleaning process after each production run of cheese to sterilize the system.

Tri Tech has worked for a wide range of manufacturing companies, creating process

automation that improves product quality, efficiency, and safety. Luke Manier, Christian’s supervisor at Tri Tech, said their corporate goal is to help “perfect American manufacturing.” According to Luke, the need for greater automation is multi-faceted, “Automation enables manufacturing to improve efficiency, safety, and reduce down-time that is a big cost. Automation also helps manufacturers deal with the shortage of skilled labor by enabling and empowering their current workforce—not always replacing jobs but helping people to become more impactful, removing mindless and often hazardous tasks.” For Tri Tech, every job is different as they seek to provide the right technology solution for the specific client’s needs.

Reviving manufacturing in the United States has been an extremely popular theme recently, with announcements of manufacturing returning to the United States including General Electric Appliances and General Motors. When asked about this resurgence, Manier stated, “If American manufacturing is going to succeed, greater automation capabilities are needed.” As Manier commented, “The industrial automation industry exists to help manufacturers or industrial producers do what they do more effectively, improving productivity, quality, and throughput. Our whole industry and industrial automation exist to help manufacturing compete on a global scale.”

According to Manier, the challenge for American manufacturing is one of modernization as many manufacturers use 30-40 year old equipment. Manier says, “Manufacturing in general is extremely competitive . . . whether you want to admit it or not, every manufacturer is competing on a global scale now. Tri Tech Automation is working to ensure American manufacturers can compete and succeed on the world’s stage.” **R**

## Alumni Profile

**Christian Lodike was no ordinary Ranken student, having earned a bachelor's degree in biochemistry before deciding to attend Ranken and pursue an electrical automation technology degree.**



**Christian Lodike,  
Electrical Automation Technology '21**

Reflecting on his entire college experience, Christian mentioned his appreciation for Ranken's work ethic requirement and how these standards have helped prepare him for his career. "Work ethic is one of the things that I know where Ranken is very different from say University of Missouri St. Louis or the community college. At Ranken being present is not only expected but required!"

Christian joined Tri Tech Automation right out of Ranken where he advanced from their production department into controls engineering. Christian credited Ranken's faculty, and a strong core knowledge and skill set that included PLC (programmable logic controller) and power distribution that prepared him for his job. Another Ranken principle, lifelong learning has also

prepared Christian for his recent role as Lead Controls Engineer in the construction of a \$1 billion cheese plant in Iowa. Even as a recent graduate, Christian described the industry and technology as "... ever evolving, there's always a new version coming out, a new program, new hardware, and new technologies."

Taking a leadership role in a project this size would be daunting for anyone, but Christian's supervisor noted his knowledge, work ethic, and willingness to take ownership led Tri Tech to give him this opportunity. Christian described his approach to this project and subsequent projects saying, "I think a big part of this role is being uncomfortable and its really those experiences that will eventually lead to you being comfortable in any position."

Christian's involvement with this project included both the engineering and start-up phases, encompassing more than nine months of on-site work. Christian said, "I focused on the clean-in-place systems and their product loadouts that included moving byproducts like whey to intake tanks before being sold separately from the cheese." The highly complex process also included an automated process to clean the entire system after each eight million pounds of milk production run, sterilizing the entire system in compliance with Food and Drug Administration standards.

With the plant running smoothly, Christian has moved onto other projects. When asked if the cheese was any good, Manier exclaimed, "He doesn't eat cheese!" **R**

# Toyota Gosei: Driving Innovation With Smart Manufacturing

If you drive a car manufactured in the USA, chances are it has airbags made by Toyota Gosei Missouri (TG) in Perryville Missouri. TG opened their plant in 1987 and employs almost 1,700 people. TG is also a primary reason for Ranken Technical College being in Perryville. TG asked Ranken to provide their staff with workforce development training, eventually providing space in their plant for additional classes.

TG is unique as a manufacturer as they also develop all their automated processes internally under the direction of Jason Robinson, General Manager Machine Engineering. Robinson describes the automation of the plant as an ongoing process with approximately 90% of production having some degree of automation. “We’ve been doing automation for a long time and just keep expanding.” TG’s goal for automation focuses on enhancing operational efficiency, improved product consistency and quality, and reducing manual labor and repetitive tasks.

One example of using automation to achieve these goals is in the shipping department. TG uses a robot to gather and package parts in the order needed for assembly. This eliminates the need for a person to do a repetitive task while integrating the shipping to fit the manufacturing process.

In the production of airbags, TG has continually worked to increase productivity through automated processes. Production of the air inflator, a central component that inflates an airbag in 30 milliseconds is made through a highly automated process that allows one single production line to make more than 70 different types of airbags. The process uses different parts based on the car manufacturer’s specifications, with these bags then going through the automated shipping process. As an example, TG makes all the airbags that go into a Toyota Camry, all being produced through a single manufacturing line for some 300,000 cars annually!

In addition to using a great deal of automation at their plant, TG also develops their own automated equipment and operations. “We build all of our assembly processes in house.” said Jason Robinson. I’m usually building between 100 and 150 processes per year. Some might be really simple assembly stations and others are more complex.” TG also uses more than 500 robots in many of their processes.



Ranken alumni play a critical role in building more than 100 automated systems each year, helping to increase efficiency and product quality.

As a company, TG is committed to very high standards of continued quality improvement that helps drive their implementation of automated systems. With more than 100 new processes added each year, how does the company determine which processes become automated? Cost and cost effectiveness are primary reasons but so is staffing, “So when it’s cost effective to automate verses doing it manually, we will look to automate. This is driven by volume of production and also the ability to get labor. This really drives more automation,” said Robinson.

Creating, building, and maintaining new automation is a huge task, one made possible by having a highly trained technical staff that includes Ranken graduates. “Half of my technical-level staff that are building equipment are Ranken graduates, so they are building this stuff every day. Maintenance is also getting a number of Ranken graduates too. We also use a number of Ranken students as interns where they rotate through

building and maintaining equipment, giving them a good well-rounded experience.”

When looking to the future of automation, Robinson and his staff focus on “smart manufacturing” and sustainability. “This is a huge project for us,” commented Robinson. “It’s not just automating a process but how do you automate the whole thing and how do you connect all those things together? How does one department know what the other departments are doing? How do you order parts automatically?”

**These are very compelling questions that industry leaders like TG are answering every day. R**



“

Ranken is leading the way in preparing the next technical workforce for the exciting changes in AI driven manufacturing.”

**DON POHL**  
**RANKEN PRESIDENT**

# Artificial Intelligence: The Next Step in Automation

In this 4,000-year journey of automation, we are now experiencing the next big thing—a great leap forward with the introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI is just developing and there are questions in and out of industry about the “role” of AI. Is it the “**big red button**” that we push for all of life’s answers? Will AI make all jobs obsolete? We asked Tri Tech (TT) and TG (TG) how they are currently using AI in automation and how they see the future of AI.



What role will AI play in automation?

**TT:** AI is one of the biggest opportunities for manufacturers to better leverage their data and turn it into information to improve their competitiveness. Use AI to help figure out what is really happening in their processes to improve productivity and be more flexible and competitive.

**TG:** AI gives us an opportunity to automate our processes as we shift towards smart manufacturing.



### What does this currently look like in practice?

**TG:** AI can give us the ability to have predictive maintenance—finding problems before they occur. We talk about real time quality control which we have been doing a little bit of this for quite a while. As a simple example, the ability to check every component and part to confirm that it has been assembled properly—we use what most people call “machine vision” to check parts and for the machine to learn by itself what is a “good” part verses what is a “bad” part.

**TT:** From a very basic standpoint, AI will handle the “mindless” or repetitive tasks that can include writing some basic code, automate tasks like creating documentation, etc. We don’t necessarily see AI as eliminating jobs but changing jobs.



### Big picture, where do you see the greatest opportunities to use AI in manufacturing and automation?

**TG:** AI can help us collect data, analyze it, and then apply the data to our operations. We would talk about Operational Technology/ Information Technology (OT/IT) in the past, but nobody could really tell you what it was. With AI, we can take the real-time data, analyze it and automatically adjust our automation. As an example, we read a signal from a machine that shows the level of efficiency has dropped down below the target and now I need to diagnose and fix the problem. AI will give us the opportunity to move to a predictive maintenance where we are alerted to a potential problem before it breaks. From a much larger viewpoint, AI can connect and automate all the

processes in the plant from inputs, production, quality control, and shipping. This is called Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) that integrates all the key parts of a business into one central platform.

**TT:** AI has the potential to unlock the power of your workforce and focus more on your customers. It will also help with problem solving that leads to identifying opportunities to be more productive. Using the OT data from machines that is connected to IT using AI analytics to give the right people the right information to make better decisions and run your business better.



### What challenges do you see with using or developing AI?

**TG:** We can collect massive amounts of data but need to know how you are using the data and how you use AI to make the most important decisions at the right time?

**TT:** AI gives you the ability to collect massive amounts of data, however you can’t implement AI if you don’t have reliable data. With a great deal of US manufacturers using equipment that is 30+ years old, it becomes a challenge to have reliable data unless you modernize to systems that are designed to collect all the data. **R**

# Future-Proofing Technical Education, Equipping the Future Workforce



**Keyvan Gerami**  
*Dean of Continuing Education  
and Workforce Development*



**Evan Gudmestad**  
*Information Technology*



**Andy Raines**  
*Electrical*



**Ryan Howard**  
*Heating, Ventilation,  
Air Conditioning, and Refrigeration*

**One of Ranken's core principles is our close connection with industry and how they help shape our curriculum.**

**Each academic program has an industry advisory committee that meets regularly, providing continuous input on where industry is going and their changing technical needs.** This also includes advice on what skills and training Ranken students need to be work-ready.

**While delving into the ever-changing landscape of automation and manufacturing,** we took the opportunity to look inward, asking several department chairs the same questions we asked industry leaders about automation and how Ranken could better prepare students. Testing ourselves to see if we are meeting our goals, we asked Andy Raines (Electrical), Ryan Howard (Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning, and Refrigeration), Evan Gudmestad (Information Technology), and Keyvan Gerami, (Dean of Continuing Education and Workforce Development) how we are preparing students for the real-world challenges of automation.

**Q: What are the most important skill sets our students need to master related to automation?**

**Andy Raines:** Industry is all about time and money, high speed production, robots, and packaging lines. If a production line goes down, that's thousands of dollars lost every minute. Our students must be prepared for high end troubleshooting – being able to quickly recognize, diagnose, and fix the problem.

**Evan Gudmestad:** Troubleshooting is also critical for Information Technology. If you are Amazon and you use robots to pull items off a shelf and place them on a conveyer and the system breaks, you must be able to troubleshoot fast which also requires critical thinking skills.

**Ryan Howard:** Critical thinking and the ability to think “outside the box.” Another is soft skills and the ability to effectively communicate and interface with business and customers.

**Andy Raines:** When we say “troubleshooting,” we are talking about the ability to use your core base of knowledge to analyze the situation. All technology is evolving at a rapid pace, and new technologies are being used – and we have to prepare students to be lifelong learners and always adapting. These technologies are built on the core basics and a knowledge base that students need to master to be effective in industry.

**Q: How is Ranken preparing students and people already in industry for the advancements in automation?**

**Ryan Howard:** It starts with faculty. Before we can teach new technologies, we have to have the faculty that want to learn and master those technologies first.

**Evan Gudmestad:** When it comes to cutting edge, we could go in a hundred different directions. I first look at IT industry data and trends. We talk about being “data driven” because we are the industry that makes data driven happen! I’m also checking with my industry advisory board for consistency; these are the two major influencers. But once you identify emerging best practices, faculty have to learn the technology with the teacher becoming the student before you can teach the information. Learning new information will help you see how best to incorporate the new technology into your curriculum.

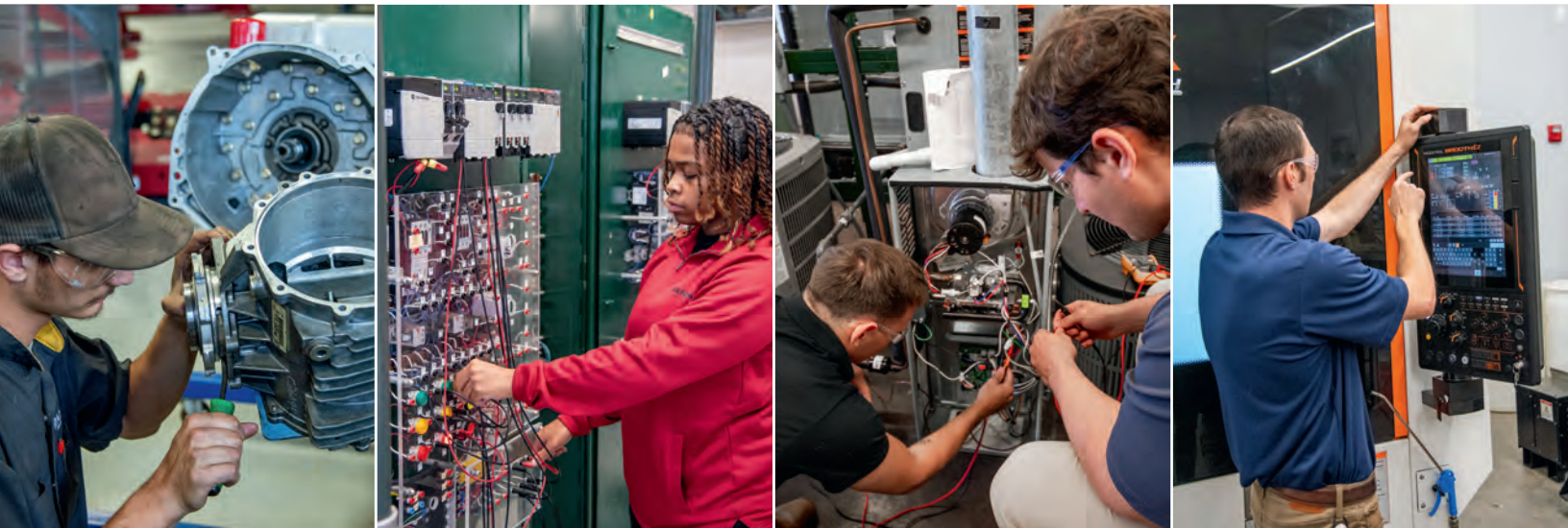
**Keyvan Gerami:** Ranken’s Workforce Development (WFD) training is often our first response to new technology because we are typically responding to a direct request from industry to help get their staff up and running. Our WFD faculty are very in tune with learning new technology and developing a curriculum to meet the objectives of industry. All our trainings are customized and range from basic training to advanced training.

**Q: What changes have you made that will benefit our students with automation?**

**Evan Gudmestad:** We have added Python Programming as part of our Cisco Academy curriculum to help students learn how to program the software to automatically fix networking issues such as when the power goes out and the system reboot doesn't work, instead of a technician having to fix the problem the device can, in some cases, fix itself.

**Andy Raines:** We have added vision on robots and expanded our robotic program of hands-on instruction. We have added programmable logic controls that talk to the robot, and we are a certified FANUC robotics trainer.

**Keyvan Gerami:** FANUC training is one of our most requested programs; in fact, we expect to train more than 100 employees at TG this year as they want everyone to be FANUC certified. We also provide a number of PLC (Programmable Logic Control) classes that include Allen Bradley and Omron. **R**



When it comes to **preparing students for the future of automation**, each faculty member agreed, Ranken's formula of being industry-advised, with strong faculty, and a continued **emphasis on hands-on learning, critical thinking, and troubleshooting will prepare Ranken students for whatever the future holds!**

# Ranken Student Success Department

**Each year, Ranken welcomes more than a thousand new students. For a majority, this is their first time on a college campus and the first time experiencing a fast-paced and professional environment.**

## Helping Students Acclimate

The Student Success Department works to make this transition easier for students as they go from classroom to the technical workforce.

The Student Success Department (SSD) was established to provide academic tutoring, guidance, and general support for Ranken students. Led by Crystal Herron, Vice President for Student Success, who has been at Ranken for 34 years, having taught and tutored thousands of students, including several current faculty members. Herron has a team of counselors, each assigned to an academic division, spending more than half their time in the classroom, connecting with and assisting students. **“Our counselors work with 65% of the students throughout the year.** Some students need additional learning opportunities and tutoring, others need help adjusting to a professional technical environment, what we call ‘Ranken-izing’ them. We also help students who have issues outside of school, including students who need housing, like after the tornado. The department name really describes our goal: Student Success!”

As Ranken, being a primarily two-year technical college, SSD places a large emphasis on first-time, first-year students. This focus includes providing onboarding seminars before classes begin to introduce students to the Ranken way and the services designed to help students on their academic and professional journey.



### Levelt Leffall

First year Plumbing Technology student Levelt Leffall has used SSD to help him with the mathematics component of his program saying, “Ms. Johnson checks with him weekly and since beginning tutoring my grades have improved.”

### Ricky Williams

Another first-year student, Ricky Williams, credits SSD with helping him acclimate to Ranken and our professional environment. As an Electrical Automation Technology student, Ricky works with Pariss Reese, Student Success Advisor, who has helped him better understand his academic options and adjust to the dramatic difference in expectations from a community college to Ranken saying, “At the community college they really didn’t seem to care if I was in class or not, that’s not how we do things at Ranken!”



### Jayla McCall

Jayla McCall, a fourth-year Architectural Technology major has worked with SSD throughout her entire Ranken education. McCall credits Crystal Herron for helping her to improve her communication skills and prepare for professional life. Ms. Herron also connected McCall with Kelly Smalls and the College Bound chapter at Ranken where she spends time each week. Describing Ranken as “not a regular college, ‘hard core’ but in a good way” saying, “You really have to want it, at Ranken you are your own person, and you are responsible.” She also credits Ranken’s higher academic standards and work ethic as part of her experience as she says students will discover a “better you.” **R**



# The Great Race 2025

Ranken's participation in the Great Race 2025 was true to the phrase **"It is the journey, not the destination."** It was our first time on the ride, with a group of **"never say die"** automotive students and staff completely refurbishing a Model T as our race car.

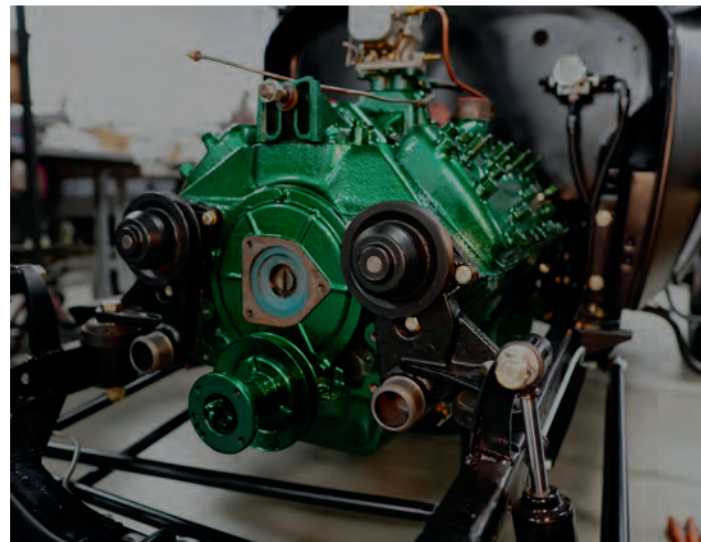
**Blood, sweat, and gears went into a unique and unforgettable "journey."**

## What is the Great Race?

The Great Race started in 1983 when founders Tom McRae and Norman Miller bought an ailing race from a promoter who had originally wanted to race refurbished pre-World War II automobiles across the United States. McRae and Miller took the concept and made it viable. The first race under McRae and Miller, was held in 1983, and has been growing ever since.

## How did Ranken get involved?

Ranken's Automotive Retro Tech & Professional Technician Instructor Rob Gibbons, who served as the race coordinator for Ranken's Great Race X-Cup team, found a long forgotten Model T listed on Facebook Marketplace in April 2024. It had been sitting in a tiny garage at a local Italian bakery since the 1980s, and as you can guess, it needed A LOT of work. But it was the perfect project for eager students and knowledgeable staff to tackle.



**Great Race 2025: Progression of Work**  
45 Ranken students spent a year rebuilding the Model T, including extending the frame to accommodate a V-8 engine, suspension, and all body and paint work.



### What happened next?

The buildout included 45+ students, Rob Gibbons, and fellow instructors Chris White and Josh Williamson working for 12+ months to get the car road-ready in time for the June 21 start. The engine was transplanted with a complete drivetrain from a 1932 Ford sedan; and all fabrication, body work, and paint was done by Ranken students. The outcome was a sharp, impressive, and formidable Model T. The striking color scheme, and choice of the Model T itself, came down to Rob Gibbons' vision.

“

I wanted to theme the car as if it were a 1930's-40's moonshine runner. The color scheme...was purposefully simple. When the Model T came out, Henry Ford was quoted as saying 'You can have one in any color, so long as it's black.'

—Rob Gibbons

The team put it through its paces with test drives covering hundreds of miles, made notes, filled in charts, and prepared for some quirks along the way. All systems were go by deadline. The driver and navigator teams (three teams total) and the support crew knew their roles and were ready to ride. The crew loaded the Model T onto the flatbed, and headed to St. Paul, Minnesota, for the start. It was the first of a multi-day road odyssey taking the Ranken Model T nearly 1,200 miles to the finish line in Lake Murray, South Carolina on June 29.

The student crew and staff leaders fought the summer heat, some quirks with the brakes, a quick stop to buy some welding equipment, and even a blown tire on the support van following the Model T! But they made it, ceremonially pushing the resilient Model T over the finish to complete the very last leg showcasing Ranken's hallmark dedication to hard work.

Truly Ranken Material. **R**



**Great Race 2025:** Never say die, students push the Model T over the finish line—completing a life-changing educational experience!

# Ranken Alumni

KATHRYN "KATIE" JIMENEZ

**Katie is:**

- a problem solver
- a self-starter
- an entrepreneur
- a Ranken graduate

Katie is the founder and owner/operator of Avid Electric and Communication, a highly regarded electrical services company. Founded in 2016, they provide St. Louis businesses with technicians who are fully licensed and have substantive technical training to quickly assess and address issues pertaining to security systems, fire alarm systems, and data networking. She is the backbone of her company and is known for being one of the best in the business.

Katie is dedicated to making the most of her time, energy, and focus. Her passion for her work is matched by her passion for encouraging women and other underrepresented individuals to chase their own dreams in STEM.

Katie got here out of grit and determination. She dropped out of high school and worked



side jobs while looking for her next step, her next challenge. She wanted to work with her hands and wanted to be her own boss. She wanted to do more.

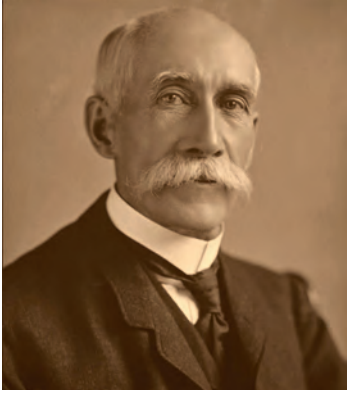
**So, she did.**

As a single mom, Katie took control of her education and her future. She researched what Ranken could provide to her... a woman who works with her hands and thinks through the process. She found a path that started in electrical and grew into Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning (HVAC). And the path is endless.

**Katie is a two-time Ranken graduate, first in 2000 with an Associate Degree in Industrial Electricity/Electronics, and again in 2011 with certification in HVAC.** She has unrivaled industry expertise and a laser focus on all aspects of the projects she takes on. **R**

**“There is no reason why women cannot become successful electrical contractors. You get back what you put in, make the most of all opportunities.”**

—Katie Jimenez



# THE DAVID RANKEN, JR. LEGACY SOCIETY

By all accounts Eugene Luettinger was your average “good guy.” Born in the Southern Illinois town of Summerfield, he was a U.S. Army veteran who served during the Korean war and was married to his wife Dorothy for 57 years until his death in 2012.

After being discharged from the Army, Mr. Luettinger attended Ranken Technical College, receiving a degree in Machining Technology in 1958 and worked as a tool designer for Kettler Tool and Die in Belleville, Illinois. This spring the College received an estate gift from Mr. Luettinger that helped nearly 100 students attend Ranken and pursue their goals of a technical education and career. **R**



Eugene Luettinger  
Ranken Class of 1958



Eugene Luettinger

In the spirit as our founder, David Ranken, Jr., Mr. Luettinger shared his financial resources and legacy with the College and our students. Ranken invites you to leave your legacy by establishing an estate gift to Ranken. **For more information, please contact Brien McCarthy at 314.286.3602 or [bpmccarthy@ranken.edu](mailto:bpmccarthy@ranken.edu).**

# LEADERSHIP / FINANCIALS

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## BY THE NUMBERS

	<u>FY 23-24</u>	<u>FY 24-25</u>
Total Enrollment (IPEDS)	1,976	2,205
Pell Grants (Low Income) Recipient %	49%	53%
Students Receiving Financial Aid %	77%	78%
Average Unmet Need (Estimate)	\$6,000.00	\$6,000.00
Scholarships Awarded	\$1,263,454.00	\$1,460,911.00
Total Institutional Aid	\$3,022,410.00	\$3,452,718.00
Operations Covered by Tuition	67%	68%
Total Gifts and Donations	\$2,567,340.00	\$2,359,974.00
Size of Endowment	\$82,039,327.00	\$87,499,846.00

# RANKEN

TECHNICAL COLLEGE

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Ranken's first Electric Vehicle camp was held this past summer.

