

Building a future

■ Applied engineering technology program at DCCC offers students hands-on training that can prepare them for a career.

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Kevin Gorum, 20, of Yeadon, was studying graphic design at Penn Wood High School a few years ago when his mom, Selena, encouraged him to check out the applied engineering technology program.

So, the then-teen looked at Delaware County Community College.

"I thought it was pretty nice with the types of machinery," he said.

He applied to the program and is working toward attaining an associate degree.

In the meantime, Gorum acquired a job at Synthes North America in West Chester.

Mike Sticklin, Synthes' human resources business partner, shared Gorum's story.

Sticklin said the company gives scholarship funding to the community college, which distributes the grant. Last year, unbeknownst to Synthes, Gorum received the scholarship.

But, Sticklin said, he wanted to personally thank the company, so it scheduled a time for him to visit. Dressed professionally, Gorum took a tour of the site and said thank you.

"That says a lot about Kevin," Sticklin said. "He's very polite, very professional, very courteous."

Later, after his visit, Gorum called to see if the company had any positions open.

Last June, he started as an entrylevel self-support operator and has worked his way up to computer numerical controls operator, where he's paid \$14.50 an hour while he continues his college studies.

Sticklin said it was advantageous that Gorum learned how to work some of the machines at DCCC.

"We're looking for mechanical aptitude," Sticklin said. "Delaware County Community College has an automated manufacturing lab. These guys get to use these machines. They not only have the theoretical part of it. They also get the hands-on knowledge."

For the last 10 years, the Delaware Valley Industrial Resources Council has been making a concerted effort as an economic development organization to bridge the gap between what highly advanced manufacturing companies need in potential employees and what skills and knowledge students have, according to Tony Girifalco, DVIRC executive vice president.

Girifalco commended DCCC and various businesses such as Boeing, Southco and Penn Machine for taking the science, technology, engineering and mathematics initiative.

Dr. Jerry Parker, president of DCCC, credited the DVIRC for making the college community aware of the critical shortage of skilled people.

"The generation of highly skilled people is about to depart," Parker said. "There's no generation coming up behind them. That's what we're trying to address in the program."

Parker said through schools' support, students have the opportunity to gain up to 20 college credits while still in high school. Then, after high school graduation, they can simultaneously work at these companies while attending community college.

After obtaining an associate degree, the students can then get jobs with the businesses, many of which would pay for the employee to get a bachelor's degree.

The arrangement has several benefits.

Students have the chance to obtain \$47,000-a-year jobs while having their



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Yeadon resident Kevin Gorum stands in front of some of the machines he works on at Synthes North America in West Chester.

education paid, Parker said.

In addition, businesses get the trained personnel they so desperately need.

"If we don't supply these companies with these highly skilled people, they are going to go elsewhere," Parker said.

Synthes in Chester County has been involved in the applied technology program for five years, according to Sticklin.

He said students have 100 percent of their schooling paid after they've worked at the company for a year.

"I think the AET program is a great program, especially for those who are interested in bettering their lives and having a great career in manufacturing," Sticklin said.

The best part, according to Gorum, is the atmosphere.

"It's pretty relaxed," he said. "I've got a good boss."

It's good enough for him to drive 20 miles to work and to fulfill his dream of providing for others.

"I just really want to support a family," Gorum said. "An associate degree in this field will help you out a lot."

In addition, his mom watches as his career unfolds.

"She said, 'you owe me a lot of money now,'" Gorum laughed.