

C.O.D. and Caterpillar Internship

By Robyn Johnson

The current need for employees in the technical/manufacturing field at Caterpillar Inc. is "at an all-time high," said Nev Milanovic, Education to Careers coordinator at the Aurora, Inc., manufacturing facility.

"We have an endless need for supervisors and skilled employees (at Caterpillar)," she said. "We're looking for highly adaptable personnel who are willing to learn new skills throughout their career."

The Aurora manufacturing plant, which is the largest of Caterpillar's 100-plus facilities worldwide, currently employs approximately 2,900 workers, with "no end in sight" in terms of the company's need for new employees, especially well-trained, educated workers, Milanovic said.

An abundance of jobs available at Caterpillar comes as no surprise to Mark Meyer, coordinator of the Manufacturing Technology program at College of DuPage in Glen Ellyn.

"Caterpillar is one of more than 100 other companies who regularly call (the college) looking for qualified, well-trained workers," said Meyer. "We currently maintain a 100 percent placement rate for students who complete one of the (Manufacturing Technology) certificates or degrees at C.O.D. There are all kinds of jobs in this industry available for qualified workers."

College of DuPage has joined forces with Caterpillar Inc.'s Education to Careers (ETC) program to offer high school seniors and first-semester college students a chance to work at the Aurora plant while obtaining a degree from the college in the technical/manufacturing field. The internship program pays for two-years of tuition and fees, as students work part-time at Caterpillar and earn their associate's degree.

In addition, the students take part in a paid, full-time summer internship to round out their hands-on training and incorporate the variety of skills they've learned during the program.

"This is a great opportunity for students who are interested in having a hands-on career in a technical field of some sort, but aren't exactly sure which area would be best for them," said Meyer, who coordinates the ETC Caterpillar internship program for C.O.D. "During the internship, students are rotated through different jobs, positions and departments at Caterpillar so they can experience first-hand the types of opportunities that exist within a world-class manufacturing environment."

Student Mark Vander Meer of Wheaton said the CAT internship and courses at C.O.D. have prepared him well for a future in manufacturing assembly and design.

"My classes at C.O.D. are very specific and focus on skill areas I need to separate myself from others that apply for the same jobs," Vander Meer said. "The internship at Caterpillar is great because it not only pays an hourly wage, it also pays my tuition at C.O.D. And, if I continue with CAT in a full-time job after my internship, the company will pay for 90 percent of my bachelor's degree. How can you beat that?"

According to the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, there is a serious shortage of qualified workers in manufacturing and electronics-related occupations in northern Illinois. This need for skilled workers prompted the Illinois Employer Training Investment program in 2005 to invest nearly \$50 million in grants to train nearly 190,000 people in more than 3,600 Illinois companies. College of DuPage (along with three local community colleges) received nearly \$882,000 in funding from this program to train more than 3,000 manufacturing employees in computer skills, technical skills and quality and safety issues.

"Education and training are definitely the two most important factors that determine an individual's success in this industry as a whole," Meyers said. "Obviously, individuals who have earned their degree at a reputable institution such as C.O.D., and also have hands-on training, will have a distinct advantage over other applicants."

Vander Meer agrees. "I think my education specifically at C.O.D. and my internship at CAT will set me apart from other potential applicants for whatever position I'm interested in," he said. "Taking these classes and having CAT on my resume definitely will give me the edge I need when searching for a job."

Henry Van Bogaert, a Fabrication Specialist at Caterpillar, recently completed pipe welding and machine shop courses at C.O.D.

"I already have an A.S. in Earth Science from C.O.D., but figured completing more manufacturing classes could only help my career here (at Caterpillar)," said Van Bogaert, who resides in Naperville. "The instructors at C.O.D. have all been in my trade for 30-plus years, so they know how to do the job and how to teach it."

Caterpillar's 350-acre Aurora site is the largest of the more than 100 Caterpillar facilities located in the U.S. and 22 countries worldwide. The 4,500-square-foot plant mainly manufactures wheel loaders and excavators, including the 994D, which is the world's largest excavator at 250 tons, with 17-foot wheels that tower over the average person.

"One of the biggest misconceptions in this business is that people who work in manufacturing go home with 'dirt on their hands' after a long, hard day of performing tedious tasks," Milanovic said. "This anything but true in today's manufacturing technology environment. All employees at (Caterpillar) are skilled in technology, and must be familiar with the computers that run all of our automated robots and machine systems. The jobs here (at Caterpillar) and in the rest of the manufacturing technology industry are both interesting and exciting, with plenty of room for growth."

According to Van Bogaert, his career at Caterpillar offers much more than a "solid paycheck" every couple of weeks.

"I like the ability to drive down the road, see a wheel loader or excavator at work, and know that I had a part in building that awesome piece of equipment," he said. "With the right education and experience, there is a lot of room for advancement into management or upper-level jobs within Caterpillar. This is a very satisfying career."

College of DuPage boasts one of the largest Manufacturing Technology programs in the Midwest, Meyer said, with four associate degree and six certificates. Degree programs offered at C.O.D. include an Associate in Applied Sciences (A.A.S.) in Manufacturing Engineering Technology, Automated Manufacturing Systems, Manufacturing Technology, and Drafting/Design.

For more information about the C.O.D./Caterpillar ETC internship or the [Manufacturing Technology program](#) at C.O.D., call Meyer at (630) 942-2038, e-mail: meyerm@cod.edu.