

Arkansas Tech University-Ozark Campus and Green Bay Packaging Technical Training Center

Executive Summary

Arkansas Tech University-Ozark Campus and Green Bay Packaging Arkansas Kraft Division have been in partnership for over 10 years, offering non-credit electrical and mechanical training to employers across the State of Arkansas. ATU-Ozark, located in Ozark, AR and Green Bay Packaging AKD in Morrilton, AR, are separated by 73 miles of interstate but have a public-private partnership on a Technical Training Center not seen in any other part of the state.

The Training Center is located in Morrilton, AR, separate from Green Bay Packaging's mill. In 2008, Green Bay Packaging had the same issue many other U.S. manufacturers were having, in they could not find enough maintenance technicians with the mechanical and electrical aptitudes to fill vital maintenance roles. Green Bay Packaging had the idea to grow their own and start a Technical Training Center off-site, away from the mill so employees could concentrate on being trained, and not called back to the mill for emergencies. At the time, Green Bay Packaging approached the State of Arkansas, including the Department of Workforce Services and the Arkansas Economic Development Commission, for funding options on starting a training center. The State agreed but asked Green Bay Packaging to partner with a higher education partner, which is where ATU-Ozark comes in.

Green Bay Packaging and ATU-Ozark located a previously shuttered Levis manufacturing plant in Morrilton, and decided it would fit the physical space needs of the Center. From there, Green Bay put up most of the funding for the facility with some help from the State. A decision was made that Green Bay Packaging did not need to train their own employees five days a week, and thus ATU-Ozark and Green Bay decided to offer training to outside companies throughout Arkansas, two days per week.

In the beginning stages of the Technical Training Center in 2008-2009, ATU-Ozark and Green Bay Packaging re-fitted the building with new training equipment, sourced publishers for training materials, setup curriculum, and setup a structure of how to train employees from a wide array of manufacturers.

What was implemented was several different offerings of 5-week classes on electrical and mechanical topics, where outside companies would come for training one day a week for five weeks. Green Bay Packaging uses the other three days to train its own employees through a more concentrated, three-year journeyman program. ATU-Ozark recruits the outside companies, handles registrations, develops curriculum, orders instructional material, markets the Technical Training Center, and serves as the sole higher educational partner in the training. Green Bay Packaging owns most of the equipment and building, and uses two of its most skilled employees to teach the classes.

Partnerships and Collaborations

The partnership between ATU-Ozark and Green Bay Packaging opens up doors to many other partnerships and collaborations. There are five primary ways these collaborations occur, sometimes all at the same time and which all stem from partnerships built through the Training Center. First, electrical and mechanical training is provided to outside companies that ATU-Ozark recruits, and this training occurs through open enrollment at the Training Center. Companies register their employees and classes have multiple companies represented. Secondly, internal journeyman training for Green Bay employees occurs at the Training Center, separate from the outside classes. Third, ATU-Ozark organizes customized contract training for Green Bay employees by using both its own faculty as the trainers, or sourcing third party trainers. ATU-Ozark is the sole source for finding training providers and setting up contracts on specific training for Green Bay needs. This customized training covers topics that are not performed at the Training Center through the journeyman program, covering wide variety of topics from radiation gauge training to crane training. Fourth, the outside company training that occurs at the Training Center through open-enrollment allows ATU-Ozark to build relationships and provide customized contract training to these same companies, separate from the Training Center. On many occasions, companies that have used the open enrollment classes have asked us to setup customized training for their employees which is not offered at the Training Center. Recent examples would be Microsoft Excel, aluminum welding, or leadership training. In other words, a good “domino effect” occurs which opens up other doors for training. Lastly, as ATU-Ozark utilizes third party training providers for some of these customized contract trainings, we are able to setup open-enrollment training on the specific topic the training provider specializes in. For example, a trainer we have contracted with to perform a customized lean six sigma training at one individual company can now be used to conduct an open-enrollment lean six sigma training for multiple companies at the same time. All in all, these 5 scenarios stem from partnerships initiated at the Training Center.

On any customized contract training, ATU-Ozark leverages the resources of the Arkansas Department of Career Education to obtain workforce grants for these projects. ATU-Ozark writes the grant and companies like Green Bay Packaging are reimbursed for any training costs. ATU-Ozark is also able to leverage resources of outside companies who want to donate equipment for usage at the Training Center. Recently, Tyson Foods Inc. donated two hydraulic trainers valued at over \$50,000, after seeing the value their employees receive through the classes. Over 200 Tyson workers have been trained at the Training Center across several different Tyson locations in Arkansas.

The Training Center fills one of the state’s largest workforce and economic skills gaps, which is that of hands on technical skills. Several maintenance positions go unfilled simply because employers cannot

find skilled electrical and mechanical technicians. The facility is promoted on the Arkansas Economic Development Commission's website as a go to resource for targeted manufacturing industries to receive training. It can also be used as a tool for the AEDC to attract new employers, by showing there is a place to train workers on a non-credit basis.

In terms of funding, the Training Center and ATU-Ozark have setup a model where costs to use the Center for outside companies are very low. Classes range from \$300 to \$595 per person per class, a rate much lower than finding this type of training elsewhere. Registrations are accepted by ATU-Ozark on the front end. Green Bay Packaging then invoices ATU-Ozark a percentage of that fee as facility usage. Most of the equipment is owned by Green Bay Packaging along with the building.

Economic Impact

Over the long term, the Technical Training Center in Morrilton reaches every corner of the State of Arkansas with almost 60 companies using the facility for their incumbent worker training needs. Each employee trained brings new knowledge back to their plants, thus making the employee more easily retained and skilled. Companies like ConAgra have mentioned they have saved several plant downtime hours and dollars now that their employees know how to properly align drives and shafts, rather than replacing the entire piece when it fails. Reduced downtime and cost savings is one of the main compliments we receive from outside companies, which saves numerous dollars in repair costs.

In the short term, employees from outside companies coming into Morrilton on a monthly basis help the community of Morrilton as these employees spend money in the community. These employees visit hotels, restaurants, and gas stations, thus increasing the viability of local businesses and the tax base.

Additionally, the customized training that occurs as a direct reflection of relationships built at the Training Center, helps other companies save money through the grant funding ATU-Ozark applies for on their behalf. Companies can save money by using a college for their training needs, and the Training Center helps attract new clients for other types of training.

Program Results

Since teaching its very first class to outside companies in 2010, what has evolved has now been over a decade of technical training reaching 57 companies in Arkansas and over 1,006 employees from those companies through the end of calendar year 2019. These employees come to class one day a week for five weeks, and receive a certificate of completion at the end of the course. Very few employees do not attend all five days, as they are still being paid by their employer to attend. Companies use the certificates as a tracking tool for what types of skills the employee has learned. For the outside companies, the following

electrical courses are provided: Programmable Logic Controllers Level 1/Intro, PLC Level 2, Basic Electricity/Electronics, Intermediate Electrical/Basic AC Control Equipment, Electrical Troubleshooting, Batteries and DC Circuits, Advanced Electrical/Transformers and AC Circuits, Three-Phase Systems, Reading Technical Diagrams, and Electrical Measuring Instruments. The following mechanical classes are offered: Bearings and Lubrication, Maintenance of Mechanical Drives, Precision/Laser Alignment, Introduction to Hydraulics, Pump Systems, Introduction to Blueprint Reading, Mechanical Layout, Machine Shop Practices, and Millwright Practices.

The outside company classes at the Training Center have also been on an upward trend since 2014, year over year. The number of companies using the Training Center in 2014 was 11, and increased year over year to 27 in 2019. The same is true for the number of employees trained, which was 33 in 2014 and increased year over year to 200 employees in 2019.

Many employees ask their employer to return for additional class topics. One retention strategy utilized is surveying companies to see what new topics they need. As a result, new classes such as Machine Shop Practices and Three-Phase systems were added. Also, the one-day-a-week model keeps employers from losing employees for days at a time. ATU-Ozark has not had a registration fee increase in over 6 years as well. Finally, more classes are now progress from introduction to advanced courses on similar topics.

Replication

This Training Center can be replicated in other regions if the local, large industry has a strong relationship with its local college. Each has different roles, and ATU-Ozark has developed a standard operating procedure for all aspects of the outside company training which could be followed. This document covers everything from the ordering of books, scheduling of classes, costs, and marketing. The operations could not happen without the initial financial input by Green Bay Packaging. They own the facility and most of the training equipment within it. ATU-Ozark provides the structure of the training, especially for the outside companies. One other part of the model that makes this partnership work is that the instructors are employees of Green Bay Packaging, not ATU-Ozark. This allows Green Bay Packaging to teach other topics to its own employees, while reserving two days a week for these instructors to teach outside companies that ATU-Ozark recruits.

Neither ATU-Ozark nor Green Bay Packaging setup this partnership and Training Center as a revenue generator, which we believe helps sustain it rather than take away. The initial concept which involved the Department of Workforce Services and the Arkansas Economic Development Commission was one that would be for the greater good of Arkansas, training outside companies along with Green Bay employees.