Kyle Fritz jumped into the wind energy sector right after graduation, and has no plans to move on.
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As Ridgewater College prepares to celebrate its 50th Anniversary, I’ve been looking at some old yearbooks and news clippings. It has been enjoyable to escape into the “good old days” of higher education—the days before dwindling state support, budget cuts, and accountability pressures that question the value of higher education. As I look at the pictures of students and faculty from those early years, all wearing ties and sport coats, it seems like everything was just moving along smoothly without a worry in the world.

To help commemorate our 50th, we are conducting oral history interviews with former employees from those early years. I’m eager to hear their stories, but I’m enough of a historian to know that beneath the façade of coats and ties we’ll likely hear that there were challenges even during the “good old days.” I also know, as Thomas Wolfe put it, that you can’t go home again. We can only live in the present; the past is gone and the future isn’t here yet.

Though the challenges of this present seem daunting, they are also exciting and full of potential. For example, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation just funded a pilot project with ten community colleges that will make use of technology to create a Virtual Incubation Network. According to the April/May issue of the Community College Journal, the project involves collaboration between the American Association of Community Colleges and the National Association for Community College Entrepreneurship designed to “work with small business development centers and small business association resources to expand their capacity.”

Ridgewater College is not one of the pilot colleges involved in this project, but I mention it as one example of an innovative approach being taken in this uncertain time. At Ridgewater, we’re working with local economic development professionals in Hutchinson and Willmar to see how we might collaborate. In Hutchinson, we created the Business Development Center in the Industrial Park to bring a host of business resources together in one place. In Willmar, we’re working with the University of Minnesota and the MinnWest Technology Campus to explore how we might work together to expand opportunities for students interested in bioscience. On campus, we’re exploring new initiatives in agriculture—and we’re always looking for ways to better fulfill our mission to serve the learners who come to us.

As our 50-year history illustrates, some of these initiatives will not come to fruition. Despite that fact, I believe we’ve never lived in a time of greater potential. As you read about some of our graduates in this copy of the magazine, I think you’ll conclude as I did, that the payoff from previous initiatives like the creation of our Electrician program or the many uses of technology in the classroom has and will continue to pay big dividends. I hope the stories inspire and entertain!

Dr. Douglas W. Allen
President
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10 Questions

Why does Ridgewater use technology in the classroom?

Faculty members use significantly more technology in the classroom than years ago to improve the learning process for students. Ridgewater College sees the upgrading of classroom technology as an ongoing, evolving, and dynamic process, aimed at being reflective of current technologies and the needs of faculty and students.

How does technology benefit students?

Technology might assist faculty in keeping their students engaged in classroom activities as well as in preparing students for the technical world they may work and live in. An example might be a nursing instructor showing YouTube videos to illustrate an emergency situation and how it was handled or a math instructor showing various methodologies to solve complex mathematical equations.

Most Minnesota postsecondary institutions utilize an Instructional Management System (IMS) that provides an online platform. The most popular platform used by the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system is D2L. What is it?

D2L, short for Desire2Learn, is the chosen platform for instructional management by MnSCU. Students can view educational videos, take online quizzes and tests, and upload or download assignments and projects. Both technical and liberal arts students benefit from D2L technology either by seeing videos or the instant results they receive when taking course assessments. Ridgewater College was one of the first campuses to host its own video server, now with almost a terabyte of video. Nearly 70 different programs of study utilize the video server, with everything from how-to veterinary technology and nondestructive testing demonstrations to English speeches and historical events.

More than 95 percent of Ridgewater classrooms are SMART classrooms. So what is a SMART classroom?

A SMART classroom currently includes a computer, digital projector, media player, Internet connectivity, and sound system. The definition of a SMART classroom, however, is regularly reviewed as new technologies emerge, as instructors find and/or develop new methods of presenting information to students, and as student use of technology evolves.

Some of those SMART classrooms may also have SMART boards. What is a SMART board?

SMART boards are an interactive whiteboard technology where students can create and interact with content on a large digital surface, creating a more hands-on learning experience. By using digital pens, digital ink and touch screens, students and instructors or students and classmates engage in the subject matter in a different way that the entire class can observe.

Throughout every day students are taking classes via ITV. What is ITV?

ITV stands for interactive television. ITV classes have an instructor and students at a host location with a camera, television and microphone, along with students at another campus through a live television connection. Ridgewater has ITV courses between Hutchinson and Willmar campuses frequently, but also between Ridgewater and other colleges like Hibbing Technical College, Hennepin Community & Technical College, Rochester Community & Technical College, University of Minnesota – St. Paul, and Minnesota State Community and Technical College - Wadena. One of the greatest benefits to students is having access to additional courses and varied instructors in subjects such as paramedics, accounting, agriculture, foreign languages, marketing, physics, pre-engineering, and history, to mention a few. If a class can enroll students from more than one campus or college, it may be more likely to fill or reach the minimum class size needed to run it, thereby enabling a college to offer a course more predictably if it is a course with lower student demand.

Videoconferencing is a technology that is growing in usage. How is it different from ITV?

Videoconference rooms are meant for small groups where there are cameras on each campus and the connection is made through a Ridgewater server rather than an outside connecting partner. It can be a time-saver for students and faculty by cutting travel time, and a money-saver for the college by reducing connectivity fees with outside sources and travel expenses. Students might use videoconference either for intercampus meetings or for classes, like drafting, where Hutchinson and Willmar instructors partner to teach courses on both campuses. It offers additional teaching peripherals such as more cameras and computer connectivity so that the experience really is more like a telepresence rather than a television.

Are there technologies that are changing outside the classroom as well to help students become savvy technology users?

Ridgewater has about 1200 computers available to students in labs, classrooms and libraries. With so many students also using their own personal laptops, it’s extremely helpful that they have wireless connectivity through 99 percent of the campuses. Students use their laptops in cafeterias, hallways,
Online learning is growing worldwide. How is Ridgewater changing to meet student demands?

In the last four years, Ridgewater’s number of online course sections has expanded by 160 percent. Our video server is heavily used for online classes such as law enforcement, activity director, and drafting. Some students talk to their online instructors or see their instructor’s computer screen through Adobe Connect. Just as traditional instructors are working to keep students engaged in their classrooms, online instructors are doing the same for students to have successful experiences. Through links to YouTube or other sites, recorded presentations, PowerPoint lessons with instructor voice-overs, or live Webex interactions, students have much more of an interactive classroom experience with online courses than they did years ago. To learn more about why students opt for online courses, go to http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lisa-nielsen/10-reasons-students-say-t_b_812785.html?ref=fb&src=sp.

What technology improvements are on the horizon for Ridgewater students?

Mobility is a big thing for today’s students, staff and faculty. The technology they use is shrinking smaller but the opportunities to use them are expanding. People used to go to meetings with their laptops; now they take their smartphones. Ridgewater has recently installed technology that enables students and staff to plug in their iPods, iPads, or iPhones - pretty much any mobile device - into a classroom projector to share their work, ideas or videos more easily to contribute to the classroom experience. The technology is available - now it’s a matter of watching its exciting use unfold.
Fifteen students in Sam Nelson’s Minnesota History class have the unique opportunity to document the experiences of Korean War veterans. And, because Ridgewater is a partner in the Veterans History Project, the documentaries created by the students may be permanently archived in the United States Library of Congress.

The effort is part of a service learning initiative between the students in Nelson’s Minnesota History course and the Kandiyohi County Historical Society. Veterans have indicated to the Historical Society their willingness to participate in the project. Nelson sent letters to the vets, and the students are following up to schedule a videotaped interview. The students then format the approximately one hour of footage onto a DVD and the interview is put on file at the college. With the permission of the participating veteran, the documentary is then also sent on to the U.S. Library of Congress for permanent addition to their archives.

In addition to building their appreciation for the sacrifices veterans have made for our country, the students are gaining many valuable skills, including communication skills, research experience, multimedia technology skills, interpersonal and intergenerational relationship skills, and a stronger sense of community.

The number of short-term online training offerings is about to multiply for clients, companies and students who look to Ridgewater College’s Customized Training & Continuing Education (CTCE) for non-credit continuing education options.

Ridgewater’s CTCE has long partnered with an online partner called Ed2Go. It has been a resource for six-week trainings in everything from computers, business and certificate preparation to personal enrichment, health care and grant writing.

Beginning in May, Ridgewater will have an additional online resource, Vivid Learning. The new partnership will expand the online training possibilities in occupational safety, health care, employment law, professional development, health insurance portability (HIPAA) and more, according to Kathy Schwantes, Ridgewater dean of Customized Training. The technical courses range from 30-minute sessions to several hours in duration.

According to Schwantes, the impetus to explore more short-term online training options was safety training for one or two employees at a time. “Vivid Learning is a wonderful source for technical training and complements the programs we already have in-house,” Schwantes said. “It is designed to meet the needs of individual students and companies.”

She explained that the online program allows Ridgewater Customized Training and Continuing Education to become an even more valuable partner to companies’ human resources and corporate training departments. If fully utilized, companies can not only tap into the training when it is convenient to employees, but can also use tools within the program to track and monitor required training for employees at a company level. “The partnership is about coming together to meet the needs of the companies and the people we serve,” she said.

A complete list of online courses can be found on the CTCE website at ridgewater.edu/customized or by calling 320-222-5206.

Major categories of new online courses available through Ridgewater:

- Occupational Safety
- Employment Law
- Healthcare
- Department of Transportation (DOT) Safety
- Hazardous Materials
- Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)
- Professional Development
- Environmental Management
- Electrical Safety Workplace Practices & Standards
- HAZWOPER
practicing interviews with strangers is a bit more of a challenge – yet so important. For many students, a mock interview helps them see what interviews are truly like. For older nontraditional students, it’s a much-needed refresher if they maybe haven’t interviewed in 10-20 years.

anderson said he strives to make the experience as real as possible – that means arriving early for the interview, making a positive first impression with the receptionist, and successfully interviewing with someone they likely don’t know. What results is experience, but even better is experience with written feedback on their performance.

“They are taught that the interview starts the minute they get out of their car in the parking lot,” anderson said. Then, for example, in Hutchinson, they enter the front door where Ridgewater receptionist amy Mathews greets them and has them wait for their interviewer. Sometimes she takes notes and shares feedback with anderson.

Then it’s off to the interview with Leah Elrod where she may ask questions about everything from skills and experience to strengths and challenges.

“A common mistake that people make is lack of preparation,” Elrod said. “It’s important for interviewees to think through how they will answer typical questions such as ‘Tell me about yourself’ or ‘Why are you interested in working for our company?’” Students seem especially appreciative of the practical strategies Elrod shares for organizing their answers.

One thing students learn quickly in anderson’s class is that the interview is not just about what the interviewee says. “There’s a thing that’s big now called ‘Hiring for Attitude,’” anderson explained. He’s learned from spending time with various human resources staff in different communities that it’s how candidates come across – often nonverbal and more about manners, protocol, and soft skills. Yes, employers want you to have technical and career proficiency, anderson explained, but “what they can’t teach you and what they want you to exhibit are transferable job skills…. If you have a good, positive attitude, you’ll be hired over the technical superstar every time.”

anderson also works closely with the Ridgewater Career Services office, often having staff members Sally Kerfeld, ardith Ampe and amy Mathews as guest speakers. “They do a first-class job and share the many advantages available exclusively to Ridgewater students and alumni.” Then it’s up to the students to use the resources.

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“To win at the employment game, you have to know the rules,” anderson said. With an Employment Prep class, you’ll be in the game and on your game.

Note: Ridgewater’s Employment Prep and Retention course is a one-credit accelerated course that covers eight weeks. It is open to all Ridgewater students as well as interested community members taking six or fewer college credits. Such casual students are not required to formally apply to the college.
It’s no secret that America’s older population is growing in numbers. With age often comes the need for more assistance in everyday living.

Ridgewater College is responding to the growing demand and providing another rung to the healthcare career ladder by adding Health Support Specialist (HSS) to its long list of program opportunities.

Working nursing assistants can now take their training a step higher by participating in this nine-credit, seven-class registered apprenticeship program that partners Ridgewater College with Century College and Hennepin Technical College through a convenient online format.

In 2010, Ridgewater began the pilot stage with 15 students in the first three-credit course, Introduction to HSS. Now the program, developed through Aging Services of Minnesota, has state approval from the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System and is moving forward with the entire program.

“That’s the beauty of the HSS program,” Reginek said. “It’s a partnership with facilities and other colleges.” Current students in the HSS program come from Willmar’s Bethesda, Nielson Place in Bemidji, Big Fork Valley Communities, and Perham Memorial Hospital and Home, to name a few. Students do the coursework online and then have 2,500 on-the-job practice hours. It helps further their careers, likely also empowering them to earn more money. An added bonus is that many participating facilities see the training as a staff investment and thus foot the bill.

HEALTH SUPPORT SPECIALIST CURRICULUM

Introduction to HSS
Meaningful Activities
Memory Care
Culinary Care
Physiological Care
Psychosocial Care
Environmental Services

For more information, go to
www.ridgewater.edu/programs/activitydirector
www.healthsupportspecialist.org
or contact Julie Reginek at 320-234-8588
or julie.reginek@ridgewater.edu.
Spurred by changing industry demands and student needs, officials at Ridgewater have completely remodeled the Carpentry program. Formerly, the program was two years and offered a diploma and AAS degree option. The new program will add a one-year diploma option, and enhance the two-year options with an Advanced Carpentry diploma, or an Advanced Carpentry AAS Degree.

“Some students were indicating to us that they were very interested in a one-year program option,” said Mike Boehme, dean of instruction. “This message, coupled with the changing needs of the housing and construction industry and our desire to be a leader in carpentry education, led us to review our curriculum and make the changes necessary to move the program forward.”

Students in the first year of the redesigned program will enjoy a great deal of hands-on work, going beyond the previous model to include concrete work and green construction methods. In addition to extensive lab projects, first-year students will work with second-year students to construct a home - each performing tasks appropriate for their educational level.

Students opting for a two-year program will gain more experience in project management, planning, and supervision. They will perform many higher level duties at the jobsites during the construction of the project homes, including advanced construction skills, materials management, scheduling, and planning. There will also be an option for students choosing this path to take a 5-credit internship, an addition that has been well received by area home builders.

“This redesigned program really creates a win-win situation,” concludes Boehme. “It provides students what they want in terms of options, while ensuring that they will leave the program with the skills necessary to succeed in today’s construction industry. We’re excited about the opportunities available to our students within this program model.”

Ridgewater College has received notice from the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) that they have granted initial accreditation to the college’s Emergency Medical Technician - Paramedic program.

To achieve accreditation, an institution must meet strict standards tied to resources, personnel, program goals and outcomes, curriculum, and student assessment.

The accreditation stems from a review conducted by the Committee on Accreditation of Educational Programs for the EMS Professions (CoAEMSP). The review affirmed the program’s compliance with nationally established accreditation standards. The accreditation status is effective through September 2015. Ridgewater’s EMT and Paramedic programs have a long history of success and train over 100 Emergency Medical Technicians each year.
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Contact: Sam Nelson
320-222-7527
sam.nelson@ridgewater.edu
It’s a good thing Kyle Fritz isn’t afraid of heights.

The 2007 graduate of Ridgewater College’s Electrician program works high above the prairie, maintaining and repairing equipment in one of the industry’s most exciting, cutting edge sectors—wind energy.

“Most electricians work installing or retrofitting light sockets in homes and businesses, I get to work on control systems for electrical generation 300 feet in the air,” he says.

Fritz’ journey with wind energy began at Ridgewater when he went on a class field trip to the Suzlon Wind Energy plant in Pipestone, Minn. While visiting the workshop, where
Suzlon specializes in manufacturing wind turbines, Fritz was exposed to wind energy for the first time.

“I got to look around a wind turbine and I really liked it,” says Fritz. “It was cutting edge; it was the newest thing around.”

One of Fritz’ instructors at Ridgewater, Lee Floren, saw something spark in Fritz after that first suzlon field trip, and knew wind would be a good fit.

“It really spurred an interest. He looked at that and grasped it, and that’s really what he wanted to do,” says Floren. “There’s a lot of components within a wind generator setup and [Fritz’] great mechanical aptitude and the outstanding positive outlook he has towards going after something, that is a great boon.”

Thanks to that first visit, and the contacts he made, Fritz interviewed for a position at Suzlon. Shortly after graduation, he was hired as a service technician. For a year and a half, he was responsible for cleaning, troubleshooting and replacing electrical components on the company’s wind turbines, all the while keeping his ear to the ground and learning about wind energy.

“I learned all their systems, troubleshooting and schematics,” he says. “Ridgewater is what gave me that foundation to be able to walk into it, and within a year and a half, have everything down to where I knew what I was doing.”

Fritz left Suzlon in 2011 and currently works as an instrumentation and electronics (I&E) technician in Petersburg, Neb., for Edison Mission Group (EMG), a California-based company that manages wind turbine farms across the United States.

“Ridgewater is what gave me that foundation to be able to walk into it...”

“Working With Wind

After learning about electrician opportunities in the wind sector, Fritz was initially drawn to the field for the job security.

“I was looking for a career where I wasn’t going to get laid off in the winter, I was going to have steady, full-time employment utilizing my skills as an electrician that I learned at Ridgewater,” he says. “This is an industry in which I can be doing the same thing or get into newer things for the next 30 to 40 years
“Knowing that I wanted to do something construction related, I figured that being an electrician would probably be my best career option.”

“Wind is such a new and expanding field,” he says. “One of the things I love is that every time I tell someone what I do, they have a million questions for me, so I get to provide community outreach by proxy.”

As an I&E technician, Fritz uses all the skills he’s honed as an electrician both at Ridgewater and in his first job at Suzlon, and then some, as he cares for Edison’s Laredo Ridge Wind Farm in tiny Petersburg. Powered by 54 GE turbines, the wind farm generates about 81 megawatts of electricity, enough to power 26,000 homes, and it’s Fritz’ job to keep the turbines humming.

“I do everything from work on turbines to work on the substation,” he says. “I basically run my horizon, from the wind turbine to the whole distribution system.”

Through both his work and sharing what he does with others, Fritz has become an avid supporter and advocate for alternative energy sources, particularly wind, often dispelling myths about the turbines, like they are too loud or destroy natural wildlife habitats.

“This is probably the cleanest, safest, environmentally friendly thing you can possibly get,” he says. “I’ve seen pheasants eating corn right next to a turbine that’s running. The public needs to become more educated about them. That’s why we’re here too, so when people do have questions we can answer them.”

Fritz also appreciates how the wind energy sector has been a boon for small towns, like Petersburg, a town of 300. A wind farm creates several hundred jobs during initial construction, leaving a handful of employees, like Fritz, behind who work on the operation and inject money back into the local economy.

“We try to get everything we possibly can locally, everything from going down to the store to get gas to the little grocery store to get coffee,” he says. “Most of the time they put wind parks up in places where there aren’t major metro areas, and that helps out those little communities a lot.”

As wind farms become more prevalent—Nebraska will soon have three EMG farms—and the nation continues to seek affordable alternative energy sources, Fritz’ future with wind looks bright.

Fuly Prepared

Born and raised in Willmar, Fritz spent summers during high school working in the Ridgewater College kitchen. As he worked, he would talk with students about the school, what they were studying, and the careers they hoped to pursue after graduation. When his time came to enroll in college, he knew right away that Ridgewater would be a good fit for him.
Also important was Ridgewater’s focus on safety, especially for Fritz, who spends much of his time up in the air.

“Knowing that I wanted to do something construction related, I figured that being an electrician would probably be my best career option,” he says. “I had talked to the teachers prior to enrolling and asked what it was all about. I got a tour of their shop and I really liked the hands-on aspect of it.”

Ridgewater’s hands-on approach to instruction is designed to ready students for a wide variety of careers in electricity, including those in high-tech sectors like wind energy.

“We give a broad overview of a lot of things in the electrical industry,” says Floren. “Once students get the broad spectrum of the theory of electricity, they should be able to grasp a lot of the other stuff that comes their way. We can give them the entry level skills to get into any field they want to get into, and [they] take it from there.”

It was this broad foundation in theory, codes, safety, and motor control that Fritz found the most helpful as he transitioned from his role as a student to a career in wind energy.

“Basic theory on how electricity [works] is always a good base to have. Aside from that, the classes I took in schematic reading and motor control have been very well used,” Fritz says. “The wind turbine itself is run about 80 percent electrical and 20 percent mechanical, so it’s good to know how bearings and boxes and stuff work, but to understand the fundamentals about how you can control electricity using electricity is even more important.”

Also important was Ridgewater’s focus on safety, especially for Fritz, who spends much of his time up in the air.

“Being 300 feet in the air and working with electricity, there’s not a lot of room for oops,” he says.

In all, Fritz is looking forward to a life-long career in wind energy, and looks back on his time at Ridgewater as the first milestone along his windy journey.

“Going to Ridgewater was the first step, and probably biggest step, that I had to take to get into wind,” he says. “To try to learn that without college instruction would have been very, very difficult.”

The State of Wind

By working to keep the wind turbines up and running at Laredo Ridge Wind Farm in Petersburg, Fritz is contributing to a wind boom on the plains of Nebraska, a state with the sixth highest potential for wind energy in the country.

Since 2008, Edison Mission Group (EMG) has located two wind power projects in Nebraska, and is set to start construction on a third this fall. Together, the three projects—including Laredo Ridge—will produce about 5 percent of Nebraska Public Power District’s (NPPD) power. NPPD’s goal is to obtain 10 percent of its energy from renewable sources by 2020.

The state’s wind farms are also a boon to local economies. Laredo Ridge generated about 170 jobs during the construction phase of the project, and continues to employ a handful of people, like Fritz, who oversee day-to-day operations. Additionally, the farm will generate about $6 million in taxes and fees for local and state economies over the next 20 years.
With the recent economic downturn, job opportunities for new college graduates have declined in some industry sectors. But Randy Gades, Ridgewater electronics and wireless communications instructor, says the electronics field remains strong.

“Well over 90 percent of our Electronics Technology program graduates find jobs within the first year,” says Gades. “Right now, I have over 30 job postings sitting in my office. Our students are highly sought after by employers and often they’re promoted very quickly.”

AN ELECTRIFYING CAREER

Joshua Henslin is a shining example of what is possible for Ridgewater’s Electronics Technology program graduates. He completed his Electronics Technician Associate Degree in 1998. Henslin knew he wanted to continue his education, so he enrolled at South Dakota State University in the Engineering Technology program.

“I needed a job while I was going to school and a friend mentioned Daktronics,” says Henslin. “I had never heard of it, but I decided to apply and got hired on as an electronics technician.”

Henslin’s job was to trace and fix problems with Daktronics’ electronic products, a task for which he was well prepared by Ridgewater.

“I was able to read schematics and troubleshoot to the component level,” Henslin says. “Ridgewater gave me the confidence to take initiative. It wasn’t...”
long before I was given the hard projects because my supervisors knew I could handle them.”

With over 2,600 employees worldwide, Daktronics is the leading designer and manufacturer of electronic scoreboards, programmable display systems, and large screen video LED displays. Henslin learned quickly that Daktronics literally offered a world of opportunities for skilled employees who demonstrated initiative.

Henslin moved on to an engineering internship while still in his junior year at SDSU. Working under an electrical engineer, he updated schematics using AutoCAD software and helped design a new fiber optic communication interface for electronic transportation displays in Rhode Island.

From there, he became a “road warrior,” as he calls it, rotating between four months of field work and four months helping engineers design products back at the headquarters in Brookings, South Dakota. While on the road, he observed Daktronics project managers and decided that was what he wanted to do.

He got his opportunity in 2004 and is now responsible for overseeing large commercial market display projects east of the Mississippi and in Canada. Most of his projects come with price tags over $1 million. Some of the more noteworthy include HBO, Samsung and Modell’s displays in Times Square, New York City, and the Broad and High display in Columbus, Ohio.

“My job is basically to take ownership of the project after it is sold,” says Henslin. “I coordinate the engineering team, hire subcontractors as needed, manage the construction schedule and ensure the product is installed correctly and on time.”

“I like the challenge and responsibility that comes with the job. How many people can watch Dick Clark’s Rocking New Year’s Eve and say, ‘See that sign in the background? That’s one of my projects.’ One time I was watching CSI and saw a Prudential Sign we had installed just four weeks before the show was filmed. It’s pretty satisfying.”

“Ridgewater gave me the confidence to take initiative. It wasn’t long before I was given the hard projects because my bosses knew I could handle them.”

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He got his opportunity in 2004 and is now responsible for overseeing large commercial market display projects east of the Mississippi and in Canada. Most of his projects come with price tags over $1 million. Some of the more noteworthy include HBO, Samsung and Modell’s displays in Times Square, New York City, and the Broad and High display in Columbus, Ohio.

“My job is basically to take ownership of the project after it is sold,” says Henslin. “I coordinate the engineering team, hire subcontractors as needed, manage the construction schedule and ensure the product is installed correctly and on time.”

“I like the challenge and responsibility that comes with the job. How many people can watch Dick Clark’s Rocking New Year’s Eve and say, ‘See that sign in the background? That’s one of my projects.’ One time I was watching CSI and saw a Prudential Sign we had installed just four weeks before the show was filmed. It’s pretty satisfying.”

GRADS IN DEMAND

Randy Gades says Daktronics is a premier employer for Electronics program graduates, providing opportunities to apply their skills and advance. Students have also recently found opportunities at the Hennepin County Sheriff’s Office, the FBI, and DigiKey, an electronics components distributor in Thief River Falls, to name a few.

Tracey Deatherage, the recruiting manager at Daktronics, says the training provided at Ridgewater is highly valued by the company. “The Ridgewater graduates we’ve hired have good hands-on experience and a strong working knowledge of how to troubleshoot and speak the electronics language,” says Deatherage.

Currently, Daktronics has nine entry-level electronics technician positions available and although the future is difficult to predict, Deatherage says the company has been in a hiring mode since last fall. “We look for people who have good communication skills and are team players,” she says.

THE DAKTRONICS WAY

Henslin says he has appreciated the strong Midwestern values demonstrated by Daktronics employees. “I’ve had the
pleasure of knowing company founder, Dr. Aelred Kurtenbach,” says Henslin. “His core values are amazing and the company displays those. I’ve worked all over the United States and you just won’t find any more dedicated workers than Daktronics employees.”

Dr. Kurtenbach and Dr. Duane Sander, Daktronics’ founders, were professors of electrical engineering at SDSU who started the company with the goal of keeping young talent in the area. Their philosophy has made Daktronics a welcoming place for college graduates.

Deatherage says the company believes in promoting from within and often employees have several different jobs within the company before retiring. “It’s good for the company to move knowledge around and it adds to our employee retention.”

Daktronics has 15 Ridgewater and Willmar Technical College (one of Ridgewater College’s original three institutions) graduates on its payroll. Not all of them have come from the Electronics Technology program, however. Rob Deleeuw, an installation site superintendent, graduated in 1997 from Ridgewater with an associates’ degree with a math emphasis. Like Henslin, he has risen through the ranks at Daktronics and is now a site supervisor.

Deleeuw has managed projects at professional sports venues all over the United States, including Target Field, home of the MN Twins, and TCF Stadium, where the U of M Gophers play football. He says the math education he received at Ridgewater gives him the ability to think logically and anticipate cause-effect outcomes. “I’d definitely recommend Ridgewater,” Deleeuw says. “It was small enough that I got to know my instructors and other students. It also gave me a strong math foundation that helped me when I went on to pursue a four-year math degree at SDSU.”

**Keeping a Finger on the Electronics Pulse**

With rapid advancements and changes in the electronics industry, Ridgewater Electronics program instructors stay current by seeking input from an advisory council, made up of representatives from electronics companies. Henslin serves on the council. He has returned several times to speak to Electronics program students and has arranged tours for them at Daktronics.

“I have a soft spot in my heart for the Ridgewater Electronics program,” he says. “I like to talk to them about options to continue their education after Ridgewater if they choose. I also tell them that when they are ready to hit the job market, Daktronics would love to talk to them.”

Gades says program graduates can expect to make anywhere from $25,000 to $50,000 out of college as bench technicians, installers, systems maintenance, or repair technicians. He adds that as one of the few schools in the state that teaches both electronics and wireless communications, Ridgewater program graduates are finding a wealth of opportunities.

**Is the Electronics Technology Program for You?**

Students interested in pursuing a career in an electronics-related field find Ridgewater’s Electronics Technology program to be a great choice. The program offers two focus areas, electronics technician and wireless communications, both of which require a minimum of 18 months to complete. Degree options include a diploma or an associate degree. Randy Gades, electronics instructor, says “Students who find our program to be a good fit have an aptitude for math and an interest in learning how things work. From there, we teach them everything they need to know.”
Ridgewater is celebrating 50 years of creating opportunities and changing lives in 2011, and we want alumni to join in the fun! Celebratory events are scheduled to take place on each campus this fall (September 24 - Willmar campus, October 15 - Hutchinson campus) and we are excited about the opportunity to host program or department reunions. The idea is to bring alumni and students together with current and former instructors to catch up and swap stories. Athletics programs are also planning some reunion events. If you are interested in helping to coordinate a program reunion in your area, please contact Kelly at 320-222-6094 or via email at kelly.magnuson@ridgewater.edu.

In an attempt to “go green” and be more environmentally responsible, the Foundation is asking for your help in increasing our ability to use e-mail as another form of communication. As an incentive, we’re offering every former student who completes our Alumni Profile Update form at www.ridgewater.edu/alumniprofile before June 15th a chance at a $100 cash prize. Your update must include your email address to be eligible*. The winner of the drawing will be notified by July 1st.

Congratulations to Greg Luhman, Willmar Community College - Class of ’84, the $100 winner from our December-January promotion. *Those submitting updates during the recent December/January promotion are not eligible.

Starting in August, students will notice a major change in the process of applying for scholarships through the Ridgewater College Foundation when the Stars Online scholarship management system is implemented. Made possible by a technology grant, Stars Online promises to simplify and streamline the application process for students, enabling them to create and save an applicant profile in just minutes. The Stars’ “application wizard” automatically matches students to the scholarship for which they qualify.

Through Stars, students will be able to access real-time information on their application at any time during the application process. Reviewers will have secure access to the online student applications and will complete the review process start-to-finish online.

For the college and Foundation, the implementation of Stars Online is expected to reduce administrative/staff time, processing time, copying, and related expenses by 50-70% - while enhancing service to our students, donors, board members and review volunteers. The transition to Stars Online will begin in June with set-up and testing, followed by its debut on August 1 in time for the Fall application session. More details on the Stars Online system can be found on our website at: www.ridgewater.edu/scholarships.
In 2008, Scott Stulen, who attended Willmar Community College (now Ridgewater College) from ’93 to ’95 on his way to an art degree, took over as the second full-time director of the community artists’ database, mnartists.org.

The website—in partnership with Minneapolis’ Walker Art Center—launched in 2001 as a way for local artists of all disciplines to plug into the city’s vibrant creative community. Since Stulen took the helm, membership has grown from about 2,000 to more than 18,000, and he is currently launching a total redesign for the project.

As part of his redesign vision, Stulen is working on ways for artists to interact with each other and the community outside the digital realm.

“The online component has always been there, but we’ve moved off line, engaging people in person as much as we are online,” says Stulen, who received art degrees from UW-Eau Claire and the U of M after leaving Willmar, and has taught art in Rochester.

“It’s developed this feedback loop where you find out about something online, you go to an event, then you come back and talk about it online again.”

Stulen’s offline projects include an exhibition series at the Minneapolis Central Library and an open field program where the public can use the Walker’s open green space for anything from musical performances to poetry readings.

He also launched an art share program where collectors purchase shares of an art “season” and receive a different work each month. The first group of shares sold out in two hours, and Stulen already has pilot programs started in five cities across the U.S.

“I’m interested in coming up with these innovative models where we can support local artists, and also create these experiences for the community,” he says. “That’s really what my focus is, not only in what I do here but in my personal artwork.”

The 36-year-old draws audiences into his own works—paintings and sculptures that often deal with issues of failure, loss, and anxiety—using humor, irony, and pop culture references. Along with his success at mnartists.org, Stulen’s work has been well received in galleries from Los Angeles to Belgium, and sold throughout the world.

“I kind of feel like my artistic production takes different forms, but it’s all part of my creative output,” he says. “I feel lucky my job can be part of that. I feel like I’m actually making a difference and reaching a lot of people.”

For all his varied experiences and successes in the art world, Stulen looks back on his time at Ridgewater fondly, and credits the school and the faculty for giving him his start as an artist.

“I had access to facilities and faculty that I know I wouldn’t have had anywhere else,” says Stulen, who credits retired professor Robert Mattson with helping him think critically about art. “That experience [at Ridgewater] made me choose to go into the field that I did. It really formed the basis for how I not only approach my own art work, but how I approach teaching and education.”
Ridgewater College has been creating opportunities and changing lives in central Minnesota for 50 years, so we’re throwing a party.

Come see how we’ve changed over the last half century, and get a glimpse into where we’re headed.

Willmar
Campus Celebration
Saturday, September 24, 2011

- Discover Ridgewater Event (future students)
- Department/Program Reunions
- Auto Programs “Show and Shine” Car Show
- Campus Tours
- Prizes
- Food and Entertainment
- Homecoming Football Game & Tailgate Party
- Fun for the whole family!

Hutchinson
Campus Celebration
Saturday, October 15, 2011

- Discover Ridgewater Event (future students)
- 5k Run/Walk
- Department/Program Reunions
- Campus Tours
- Prizes
- Food
- Entertainment
- Alumni Art Show
- Fun for the whole family!

More details of our 50th Anniversary Celebration are available at Ridgewater.edu
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☐ My gift is to remain anonymous
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