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ABSTRACT

This packet contains the stories of 20 successful alumni of Ohio's secondary vocational programs and postsecondary technical schools. They have been reproduced as loose-leaf camera-ready art. Suggested uses for these one-page biographies with accompanying photograph include the following: illustrations for use in speeches; reproduction of complete sets for selective distribution; reproduction of individual stories for distribution to target audiences, such as students, parents, teachers, or counselors; and advertisements in local papers paid for by an individual or organization. An index lists the stories alphabetically by vocational program, listing school, student name, and occupation in 1992. These programs are represented: agribusiness; auto mechanics; computer repair; cosmetology; data processing; diversified cooperative training; drafting; electrical trades; electrical engineering/electronics; electricity; electromechanical systems; executive secretary; farm management; machine trades; marketing; and stenography/word processing. (YLB)

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SUCCESS STORIES PROFILES

Ohio Council on Vocational Education
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January 1993

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January, 1993

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"We need to do a better job of helping students understand what vocational education can do for them."

"We need to improve the image of vocational education."

Members of the Ohio Council on Vocational Education (OCOVE) have heard these needs expressed over and over again. In response, the Council engaged Researcher Frieda Douthitt to prepare a report on successful alumni of Ohio's secondary vocational programs and postsecondary technical schools.

Ms. Douthitt and the OCOVE staff had no difficulty identifying successful alumni. The problem became to reduce this project to manageable proportions. We think we've accomplished that with this packet of twenty "success stories."

In order for you to have maximum flexibility using these stories, they have been reproduced as loose-leaf camera-ready art.

- You may wish to draw upon these stories to illustrate speeches.
- You may decide to reproduce complete sets of the stories for selective distribution.
- You may reproduce individual stories for distribution to target audiences, such as students, parents, teachers, or counselors.
- You may even be able to interest someone -- or some organization -- in buying advertising space in the local paper to run one (or a series) of these stories.

These are just a few suggestions. Your use of these stories is limited only by your imagination!

Please take the time to read one story. The Council believes that should whet your appetite for more -- and fuel your imagination as to the best way to use this new resource!

Sincerely yours,

JOSEPH L. DAVIS
Executive Director

JLD:cmd

Ohio Council on Vocational Education
INDEX TO SUCCESS STORIES PROFILES
 (by Program)

<u>Program</u>	<u>Schools</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Occupation in 1992</u>
Agri-Business	River Valley High School, Marion Tri-Rivers Career Ctr., Marion Ohio State Univ., Marion	Scott Heimlich	Senior at OSU. Plans to take Veterinary Medicine.
Auto Mechanics	Maysville High School, Zanesville Mid-East Ohio JVS, Zanesville Agriculture Technical Institute, Wooster	Jennifer Switzer	Student, Ag. Tech. Inst.
Computer Repair	North College Hill High School, Cincinnati Scarlet Oaks Career Development Campus, Cincinnati	Tracee Woods	Technician, Computerland, Cincinnati
Cosmetology	Lincoln High School, Gahanna Eastland Career Center, Groveport	Andrea Burleson	Owms beauty salon. Also retail sportswear business.
Cosmetology	Oak Hill High School, Cincinnati Diamond Oaks Career Ctr., Cincinnati	Jim Ziegler	Hair stylist, Gidding-Jenny, Cincinnati
Data Processing	Whetstone High School, Columbus Ft. Hayes Career Ctr., Columbus	Thomas Snide	Owms TCS Software, Dublin
Diversified Cooperative Training	Findlay High School Ohio State University, Lima University of Toledo	Christina Ryan	Student, University of Toledo

<u>Program</u>	<u>Schools</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Occupation in 1992</u>
Drafting	Mifflin High School, Columbus Northeast Career Ctr., Columbus Columbus State Community College	Cristina Jackson	Drafter in telecommunications section, Burgess & Niple, Columbus
Drafting	Belpre High School Washington Co. Career Ctr., Marietta Ohio University, Athens Life Chiropractic School, Atlanta, GA	Dr. C. Doug Piersol	Entrepreneur: chiropractic clinics, built income property, started billboard company, oil business, rehab center
Electrical Trades	Eaton High School Montgomery Co. JVS, Clayton	Gary Garber	Owens Garber Electric (contracting firm). Part owner of oil business.
Electrical Eng. Electronics	Southview High School, Lorain Cleveland State University Lorain Co. Community College, Elyria Polaris Adult Program, Middleburg Heights	Juan Rivera	Lead technician in fiber optics, NASA's Lewis Research Center, Cleveland
Electricity	Lincoln High School, Gahanna Eastland Career Ctr., Groveport Franklin University	Eric Jayjohn	Owens Electronics Automation Corp.
Electro-mechanical Systems	Winton Woods High School, Cincinnati Scarlet Oaks Career Development Campus, Cincinnati	Cory Dewberry	Testing technician, Metcut Research Assoc., Inc., Cincinnati
Executive Secretary	Miami Trace High School, Washington Court House Laurel Oaks Career Development, Campus, Cincinnati	Ronda Clifton	Secretary, Laurel Oaks Career Development Campus Office, Cincinnati

<u>Program</u>	<u>Schools</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Occupation in 1992</u>
Farm Management	Houston High School Upper Valley JVSD, Piqua Ohio State University, College of Agriculture	Melissa Bennett	Soil conservationist, USDA, Soil Conservation Service, Urbana
Farm Management	Tippecanoe High School, Tipp City Montgomery Co. JVSD, Clayton Ohio State University, Columbus	Dr. Chris Blauser	Veterinarian, owns large animal practice and consulting service.
Machine Trades	Ottawa-Glandorf High School - Findlay High School Owens Technical College, Findlay	Jeff Unterbrink	Machine technician, Honda, Marysville
Marketing	Newark High School Central Ohio Technical College, Newark	John C. (Jay) Barker	Assistant Vice President, Society Bank, Columbus
Marketing	Perrysburg High School Penta County JVS, Perrysburg Ashland Theological Seminary	Lee Powell	Associate Pastor, Grace Evangelical Church, Oregon, Ohio
Stenography/ Word Processing	Portsmouth High School Scioto Co. JVS, Lucasville Shawnee State Community College, Hillsboro Morehead State University, Eastern Kentucky	Susan Edwards	Orientation Trainer, BancOne

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Vocational education was this student's ticket to "a year in Germany as an agriculture exchange student" and a head start in college.

College is a breeze for **Scott Heimlich**, compared to the days he was putting in as a high school senior.

First he would take care of all the animals at the veterinary clinic where he was doing his vocational co-op experience. Then over to classes at Tri-Rivers Career Center, Marion, Ohio; pre-vet classes at the Marion branch of The Ohio State University; then back to the vet hospital for some more co-op hours; and finally home to Cardington, Ohio, to help with the family farm and study.

Scott became aware of the **agribusiness** program at Tri-Rivers through FFA (Future Farmers of America) and county fair activities. He found it would give him work experience as well as education, and that he could even get an early start on pre-vet classes at The Ohio State University. It also gave him the opportunity to spend a year in Germany as an agriculture exchange student.

When he returned, he entered OSU as a sophomore because of the classes he had been able to take while still in high school. Now a senior, Scott figures that he's got at least six more years at OSU. Then he will return to his home area, where demand is strong for a large animal veterinarian, and run the farm with his brothers.

"I guess I wasn't really involved in anything totally until I went to vocational school," Scott says. "Once I got there it seemed like I was involved in everything — FFA, student council, National Honor Society. I think it's the personal contacts with the instructors. They really seem to want to help. I had that feeling the whole time I was there."



They tried to talk her out of going to vocational school, but this future veterinarian thought it was more important to have a skill.

When someone tells **Jennifer Switzer** she can't do something, they just give her one more reason to do it.

She thinks her older brother might have something to do with her drive and determination. He wanted a little brother instead of a sister. When Jennifer was small, he'd put up blockades to keep her from following him. But she always figured a way out.

"He wasn't thinking to help me, but he was," says Jennifer. Years later, when she was the only girl in the **auto mechanics** class at Mideast Ohio Joint Vocational School, Zanesville, the blockades were verbal. When the boys tried to make her believe she was doing everything wrong, she learned to trust herself.

Others trusted her, too. Active in 4H, Jennifer attended Club Congress in Columbus, was Muskingum County Junior Fair queen, and a national competitor in small engine repair. She was also president of her school's VICA (Vocational Industrial Clubs of America) chapter. As a senior on work study with a large do-it-yourself hardware store in Zanesville, Jennifer set up the store's small engine repair shop.

High school teachers and counselors had tried to talk her out of going to vocational school. Her grades were high, and they thought she would not go on to college. They didn't reckon on Jennifer's determination.

With earnings from the hardware store, she enrolled in beef and sheep production at the Agricultural Technical Institute, Wooster, Ohio, where she's getting as much hands-on training as she can toward becoming a large animal veterinarian.

Her training included an internship in Alabama. Jennifer liked the South so much that she will pursue pre-vet and veterinary work at Auburn University after she completes her associate degree. And she'll round out her education with a commercial driver's license, because she told her brother she would.



If you want to go to college and you want to get a head start, this young computer specialist suggests going to vocational school.

Tracee Woods made her vocational choice when she was only 11. Her mother rented a computer from her job at Procter & Gamble. Fascinated with it, Tracee learned the basic operating system from her mother and found she could play computer games on her own.

She learned more about computer science as an eighth grader in Cincinnati Technical College's "Up, Up and Away" program, and announced she wanted to be a service technician. By the time she was a high school sophomore, she had accumulated enough credits to graduate. But Tracee felt that at 16 she was too young to start college. So she completed the **computer repair** program at the Scarlet Oaks campus of Great Oaks Joint Vocational School, gaining most of the credit hours she needs for an associate degree in electronics.

In a co-op job during her junior year as information center manager's assistant at Procter & Gamble, Tracee set up computers and installed software — much the same type of work she does now as a technician at Computerland, a Cincinnati computer store. She alternates between the central store service desk and the warehouse, where she gets new sales orders ready.

She likes her work because it's "a different problem on a different machine every day." But she thinks she'll probably get an associate or bachelor's degree to reach the higher skill level she sees the industry heading toward.

Tracee wants eventually to own her own computer sales and service business. It comes from listening to her father, who owned his own car repair business before a disabling injury. He told her, "If you really want to do something, you will find a way."

Tracee says, "I think with vocational education I found a way to make myself efficient in computer resources and repair and the computer way of thinking."



“Don’t do what everyone expects you to do. Do what your heart tells you to do.” Andrea is following her own advice, and her business keeps expanding.

Andrea Burleson got into hair styling with the idea of eventually going on to art college. But the money wasn’t there. However, a glance at her Design Studio in Gahanna, Ohio, shows there’s an artist at work.

Andrea has owned the business for five years and managed it for three years before that. When she moved to the Gahanna location, she oversaw the renovation and decoration. She’s developing a retail sportswear line in the store. She also wants to expand massage therapy and add salt rubs and reflexology.

“We’ve got a lot of irons in the fire,” says Andrea. “The briefcase goes home with me every night. I’m not *just* behind the chair. I’m getting to do a lot of things through hairdressing that I wouldn’t have gotten through college.”

Andrea never stops striving for excellence. “Always,” she says, “you try to put in your absolute best day, your absolute best week, your absolute best haircut. The client in front of you. . . . Beauty care may be the most personal touch that person has all month.”

She tries to carry that message to **cosmetology** students when she goes back to Eastland Career Center at Groveport, Ohio, to help with styling contests and speak to classes.

“Don’t do what everyone expects you to do. Do what your heart tells you to do,” she tells them. “Make lists: what you like to do and what you don’t like to do. Money is a by-product of success. If you’re successful the money will be there, because you love what you do so much you’re not working for the dollar sign.”



Jim thought, "There aren't many guys that do this. There is the possibility of making some money." Time has proven Jim right.

Vocational school made all the difference to **Jim Ziegler** — the difference between skipping school and perfect attendance; between poor grades and all A's; between dropping out or graduating with a skill and a job at one of Cincinnati's poshest hair salons.

Jim was so turned off by school that many days he just didn't go. His grades were mediocre to poor. He thinks he would probably have dropped out if he had not taken the **cosmetology** course at the Diamond Oaks campus of the Great Oaks Joint Vocational School.

The freedom to set your own goals and manage your own time was a shock to him.

"I thought, I'd better do my work here. This teacher's not going to tell me to do my work. It was the different structure — being in a lab, not sitting all day, that really, really helped."

"It was like a total turn-around," Jim says. "My grades were good. I had almost straight A's my senior year. In my last year I had perfect attendance."

While still a senior, Jim went to work as a receptionist at Haircrafters. After graduation, he worked for a few months in another salon before being called for a second interview at the hair salon of one of downtown Cincinnati's prestigious clothing stores, Gidding-Jenny.

He thinks vocational school taught him valuable lessons about working with people. In regular high school, you change classes and are constantly with different people, he explains. But when you are with the same 15 people for many hours a day, you learn to overcome disagreements and dislikes in order to keep on functioning together.

At first he felt funny being the only boy in the cosmetology class, but after a while it didn't matter "because we were all there learning the same thing." In fact, he thinks, he may have gotten treated a little better, being the only boy.



This businessman's winning streak began in the eighth grade. Vocational education and Ohio State University helped keep it alive.

Thomas Snide was in the eighth grade when he talked his dad into getting him his first computer. He wrote software to run his paper route.

His next big selling job came in the tenth grade. He wanted to persuade his mother that taking **data processing** at Columbus' Fort Hayes Career Center was the right choice for him. One of his newspaper customers, Don Fisher, taught computer programming at Fort Hayes. Thomas had checked it out.

A two-year head start on the average high school student, he reasoned, would give him a terrific advantage in the job market. He was already working in computer operations at Banc One. By eleventh grade he was a laser printer operator.

It was Fisher's phone call that led him to his second job — lead programmer at Stanley Steemer carpet cleaners. And another Fort Hayes instructor, Karen Morgan-Noland, told him about the "job of a lifetime," programming for Accent on Management, a Columbus association-management company.

"You could say that vocational education led me to my wife and my life," says Thomas. While working at Accent on Management, Thomas put himself through Ohio State University, majoring in finance and industrial design. It was at Accent on Management that he met his wife, Lisa. And with the background in association management he gained on the job, he was able to start his own business, TCS Software, Dublin, Ohio, specializing in software programming and support for associations.

Thomas believes in specializing — starting early. "Vocational education programs provide that specialty that the market will reward," he says. "The marketplace does not pay for a generalist."



“Vocational education turned out to be good for me,” says this part-time student at a university branch campus.

Christina Ryan was bored with school, not because she wasn't getting her lessons but because she'd had them before.

Christina grew up in Findlay, Ohio, and moved with her family to Canada when she was in the eighth grade. In the middle of her junior year, she moved back again. Her high school classes were a repeat of work she had done in Canada.

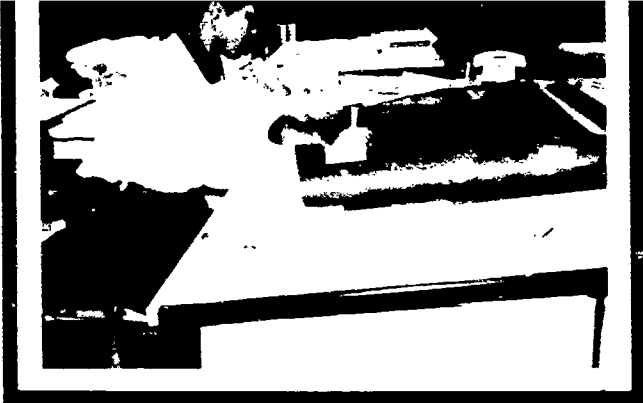
Ready to drop out from boredom, she heard of a program — **Diversified Cooperative Training** — that would let her work half days and go to school half days. But her guidance counselor told her she didn't belong in vocational school; he wanted her to stay in academic subjects because her grades were good. When she threatened to drop out, he relented.

Unsure of a career goal, she interviewed for several kinds of jobs and ended up as a lab assistant in the minor surgery unit of Blanchard Valley Hospital, Lima. She spent her senior year helping nurses who convinced her she could do anything she put her mind to.

“By the time I left, I could set up sterile procedures, tear down procedures, stock, run autoclaves, and assist the doctors,” Christina says. Now she's sure she will seek a medical career, though whether it's in medicine, nursing, or medical records, she has not decided. She worked part-time in medical records at Blanchard Valley while attending Ohio State University's Lima branch. The hospital paid half her tuition. She is now continuing her studies at the University of Toledo.

Christina is convinced she wouldn't be where she is without vocational education.

“I wish now I'd known about it earlier because I got way more out of it than high school. High school wasn't very challenging. In high school you're given a set of tracks and told, ‘This is your path and this is what we see for you.’ I don't think everyone fits into those tracks.”



Cristina says, "Teachers try to tell you you can't. They really do. But I told them I was going to do what I wanted to do." Cristina did, and it's paying off today.

Cristina Jackson made a point of taking the hard courses. At least, she figured, she'd be with people who were "really pushing" instead of just getting by.

Cristina got good grades, making National Honor Society and ranking sixth in her class of 200. Consequently, teachers at Mifflin High School in Columbus considered her college material and told her she couldn't go to Northeast Career Center. She went anyway.

"I didn't think college was really for me," she says. Through a science exploration program at Bell Labs, she had decided to get a technical skill that business and industry would value. She chose **drafting** and in her senior year got a co-op job in the Columbus headquarters of a multi-state engineering firm, Burgess & Niple. Upon graduation, the company hired her full-time.

Now as a drafter in the telecommunications section, Cristina designs conduit plans for utility lines. She'll soon advance to engineering technician. She's continuing to take technical courses at Columbus State Community College toward an associate degree in civil engineering technology.

Meanwhile she sees friends with college degrees taking mall jobs because they can't find work in their field.

She goes back to school sometimes to tell eighth, ninth, and tenth graders, "It's all up to you. It's not up to the teachers. The classes are free now. You'd better get them."

When teachers discourage them from taking vocational education, Cristina advises students, "Find out for yourself. Otherwise you may miss a chance to learn skills that will help you. Then if you want to go to college, you can have a job that will give you income to pay for it."



This “C” grade high school student became an achiever — and how!

A man of many careers — architect, engineer, chiropractor, entrepreneur, draftsman — **Dr. C. Doug Piersol** traces his success to vocational school drafting class.

Heading for a career in architecture, Doug Piersol knew he needed some **drafting** experience, and he knew he could get it at Washington County Career Center, Marietta, Ohio. The drafting experience he gained there put him head and shoulders above the competition when he entered technical college to study architectural drafting. His C's turned into A's, and his self-confidence soared.

By the time he entered Ohio University to pursue a four-year degree, OU no longer offered architecture, so Doug went into engineering. He worked for a while as a manufacturing plant engineer following graduation, but he wanted to be on his own. With his brother, also an engineer, he found a way to do so. The Piersols enrolled in Life Chiropractic School, Atlanta, and opened clinics in Belpre and Marietta.

With their dual degrees, they've also built income property, started a billboard company, gone into the oil business, and opened a rehabilitation center in conjunction with their clinics.

It was vocational drafting, Doug emphasizes, that “gave me the confidence I needed to say, ‘I can do anything I want to do.’ So I diversified, and when I graduated, the diversification never stopped.”

Both Doug and his brother say Doug's hands-on, practical background makes him more versatile. He's the one who is drawing plans for the new rehab center and applying for state and county building permits.

“In a lot of facets of your life, you can't apply theory as well as you can the hands-on experience I had going through vocational schools,” says Doug.



I went to work, and I did what I was trained to do — right — and my customers remembered that.

Whatever direction you turn at the intersection of Interstates 70 and 75 north of Dayton, you're looking at a business wired by **Gary Garber**: Bob Evans Restaurant, Red Lobster, Cracker Barrel, Rodeway Inn.

Gary first thought he'd take carpentry at Montgomery County Joint Vocational School, near Dayton. His father told him that if he was going to study something for two years it ought to be something more technical. Gary changed to the **electrical trades** program.

When he graduated, he went to work for a builder and started doing wiring jobs for friends. Soon he was doing so much wiring on the side that he realized he'd have to choose between that and his job. He told the builder he couldn't work for him any more.

"Before I knew it, I was in business without even trying," he says. His office was his living room. He'd work all day and come home and bid jobs or write payroll at night. As children came along, he realized he'd have to get another office.

About the same time, his father, a partner in New Paris Oil Company, offered to buy his electric company and sell him his share of the oil business when he retired. That is how Garber Electric came to be a division of New Paris Oil.

Garber Electric is one of the larger electrical contracting firms in the I-70/75 corridor, doing mostly new commercial construction, service, and repair. It employs about 25.

As a vocational student, Gary was active in VICA (Vocational Industrial Clubs of America). The competitions — in which he placed third nationally — gave him the chance to spend time with his teachers "and see what vocational education can do." Gary is still involved with Montgomery County Joint Vocational School as a trustee on its Foundation Board and a member of its Hall of Fame.

Far from dwelling on his own accomplishments, he'd rather focus on the next generation. "Force yourselves to do the maximum," he tells students. "Don't just do the comfortable."



Success at a community college and vocational school led to promotions at NASA for this electronics specialist. His goal now: a college degree in electrical engineering.

A family tragedy and a buddy's kindness changed **Juan Rivera's** career plans and brought him to NASA's Lewis Research Center, Cleveland, 13 years ago.

Juan was taking college preparatory courses at Lorain Southview High School, planning to go to Miami University and become an architect. Those plans changed when his father was diagnosed with cancer.

Juan went to Cleveland State University in electrical engineering instead, on a \$2,000 grant from NASA, thanks to a buddy who had entered Juan's name in a drawing for scholarships for minority students. When his father died, realizing he would have to help his mother support the family, Juan changed his field from electrical engineering to **electronics**, enrolled at Lorain County Community College, Elyria, Ohio, and got a co-op job at NASA.

When he completed his associate degree at Lorain County Community College, NASA gave him an apprenticeship in electronic system mechanics. As part of his apprenticeship, Juan went on to complete a two-year adult education program in electronics at Polaris Vocational School, in suburban Cleveland. Now, with a family of his own, he thinks it will probably take him four to six years to finish his bachelor's degree in electrical engineering.

Meanwhile his career at NASA has advanced from electronic system mechanic to electronic technician to computer specialist. He is the lead technician in fiber optics, supporting the communications requirements of Lewis Research Center's 2,500 civil service employees and 2,500 contract personnel.

"When I hook up a circuit and it works, that's my satisfaction," he says.



Eric now is sole owner of the company he joined 14 years ago as a vocational student. He says, "So many people think that once a vocational choice is made, college is out of the question. Well, that is not true."

Eric Jayjohn is sole owner and president of the company he went to work for 14 years ago on early placement from Eastland Career Center, Groveport, Ohio.

As a freshman and sophomore at Gahanna Lincoln High School, Eric was looking for a career direction. An "A" student, he still hesitated to go right from school to college.

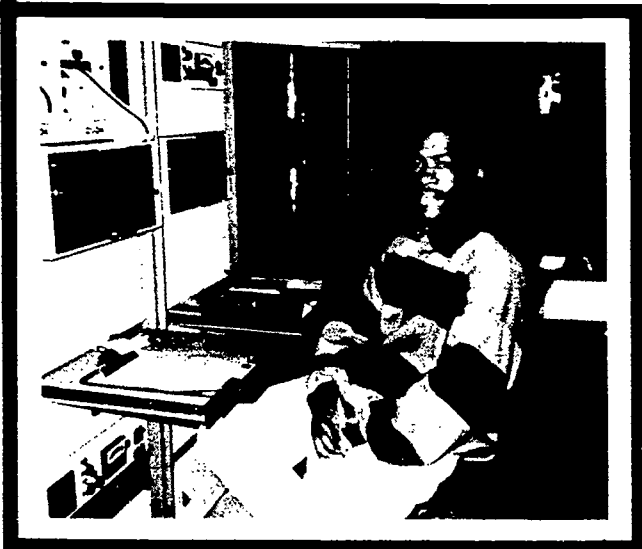
"I was hearing a lot about people who had a really expensive college diploma and no place to go," he says. "I felt I needed some kind of trade, something to have as a base."

The principal and counselors did everything they could to talk him out of his decision to enter the Eastland **electricity** program. They were very persuasive. However, Eric went ahead with his vocational commitment because he thought he couldn't change his mind.

He's glad he did. His interest in motor control got him a part-time job with the company he now owns. After graduating from Eastland, Eric studied electronics engineering at Franklin University, Columbus. As job, marriage, and family have required more and more of his time, he continues his college education piecemeal.

When his employers wanted to sell the company, Eric bought it. He gets back to Eastland often as chairman of the electronics program's advisory committee and chairman of the Eastland Vocational School District Advisory Council.

He still likes to put work clothes on and get out in the field and get his hands dirty, but he doesn't get many chances to. Running the company is a full-time job. Electronics Automation Corporation sells, installs, and services high-density records storage and retrieval systems for offices and industries. It employs 15 people and has offices in Atlanta and Washington, D.C., as well as Columbus.



Vocational school turned a light on for this research worker. He says, "I thought, I like this. I can do this. It made my last two years of high school a whole different experience."

Cory Dewberry didn't like school. He tolerated it. His grades were average and better, because his parents insisted on that.

"But once I got into a situation where I could learn hands-on," he says, "that was for me. I learned a subject in the classroom, but then in the afternoon I would go to my lab and do it, and my grades improved so much."

Art and electronics were Cory's interests, but electronics held better employment prospects. Cory learned about career opportunities and decided on **electro-mechanical systems** at the Scarlet Oaks campus of the Great Oaks Joint Vocational School at Cincinnati.

Now he is a testing technician at Metcut Research Associates, Inc., Cincinnati, operating machines that test various metals for the biomedical and aerospace industries. Soon he will start back to school to work on an associate degree, with Metcut paying part or all of his tuition, depending on his grades. He can even continue toward a four-year engineering degree if he chooses. And Cory emphasizes that vocational education gives *him* the choice.

"Now if I want to go to school, I don't have to rush. I have a good job in a good working environment. I will always have a job."

Besides teaching him the skills he uses every day on his job, Scarlet Oaks opened other opportunities for Cory, such as talking with his state representative in Columbus and competing in speech contests at state and national levels.

Yet he thinks the single most important thing he gained was "people" skills — the ability to communicate on the same technical level with the people he works with, most of whom have associate and higher degrees.



As one vocational graduate reasoned, "You will have more items on your resume than a high school graduate would — more experience, more job skills, and better opportunities."

When people in the Laurel Oaks Career Development Campus office in Wilmington, Ohio, have computer troubles, they call for Ronda.

Ronda Clifton, a secretary in the campus administrative office, can usually figure out what's wrong because she learned the Oaks' word processing program as a student in Laurel Oaks **executive secretarial** program. Besides the word processing program *DisplayWrite 5*, Ronda took typing, shorthand, dictation, communication skills, and databases and *Lotus* on the computer.

As a junior, Ronda became pregnant. With the support of her parents, fellow students, and Laurel Oaks teachers and staff, she stayed on the honor roll and graduated with her class.

A part-time apprenticeship in her senior year with Cincinnati Milacron turned into a full-time job following graduation. When the Laurel Oaks campus office asked if she'd like to apply for an opening there, Ronda said yes.

"If I didn't have the skills I learned at Laurel Oaks, I would not have the qualifications for this job," Ronda says. She also credits the professional atmosphere and high expectations of the vocational staff for her success.

"It was like a regular office. You wore business attire. If you were sick you called in."

Ronda was president of the campus chapter of Business Professionals of America; went to Columbus, Indianapolis, and Minneapolis for conferences; and came in first runner-up when she ran for regional vice president.

Ronda and her little boy, now three, live in Mt. Sterling, Ohio, with her husband, also a vocational graduate.



“I never thought my IQ was that high,” Melissa says. “But FFA taught me how to work real hard, and that’s how I got a full scholarship to OSU.”

Persuading farmers to give up their plows and adopt no-till farming does not sound like an easy job. Perhaps **Melissa Bennett** is succeeding at it because her heart has always been with agriculture.

Her mother “knew she was doomed” when her grade schooler got off the school bus talking about the neighbors’ soybeans. Her father’s FFA (Future Farmers of America) notebooks and trophies were a source of fascination, and so was the farm work she helped him with. He bought Melissa her first flock of sheep when she was two.

Agriculture offerings were limited at her home school, so Melissa enrolled in the **farm management** program at Upper Valley Joint Vocational School, Piqua, Ohio, taking chemistry, advanced English, and other college preparatory courses at adjacent Edison State Community College.

When she got to Ohio State University, Melissa says that “academically, I wasn’t any different than if I had stayed in the home school.” She was put in an honors program, became one of the top 10 scholars in OSU’s College of Agriculture, and graduated with distinction, earning a master’s degree in agricultural education.

Melissa already knew she wanted to be a cooperative extension agent when the vocational school gave her a chance to intern with the U.S. Agriculture Extension Service in her senior year. A summer job during college with the Shelby County Soil & Water Conservation District launched her career.

Now she is a soil conservationist with the Champaign County, USDA, Soil Conservation Service, Urbana, Ohio, working to protect Big Darby Creek from siltation and pollution by teaching farmers how to keep more of their soil nutrients in the land and out of the creek. She and her husband, the district conservationist for the Darke County, USDA, Soil Conservation Service, reside in Miami County.



This vocational graduate maintained a 4.0 grade-point average in science at college. Now his profession takes him around the world.

Chris Blauser found a lot more than he was looking for at Montgomery County Joint Vocational School, near Dayton. All he wanted was to study **farm management** and to get away from the drugs that seemed ever-present in high school.

What he found was a drug-free environment — “because people *wanted* to be there”; FFA (Future Farmers of America) activities that developed leadership and communication skills; and a teacher who urged him to consider college, pointing out that he could always go back to farming.

With chemistry and advanced math from his home school, Chris felt he was as well prepared as other freshmen at Ohio State University. (He kept a four point average in science at OSU.) But he had something most high school graduates didn't: leadership and communication skills gained from FFA activities, skills that are invaluable now that he is a veterinarian.

From his hilltop home outside Tipp City, Ohio, Chris travels throughout Ohio advising managers of large swine herds on nutrition, ventilation, and other management problems. A lot of his consulting is done by phone. The other 50 percent of his practice is embryo transplant work on dairy and beef herds. This aspect of his work takes him around the world.

In a society that has too many nonproductive professionals and too few “nuts and bolts types,” Chris believes in vocational education as a good place to hone a practical aptitude, gain a skill, find a direction, and — for low-achieving students — learn how to work.

“There's a lot lower student-to-teacher ratio in vocational school, and they're with one teacher all day. They can't just slack off from one teacher to the next all day long.”



Vocational alumnus says, “It was great. I got to work with my hands. I found that was what I wanted to do.”

Jeff Unterbrink wasn't sure he knew what a machine was when he signed up for **machine trades** at Findlay, Ohio, High School. He had never run a machine. No one in his family had been a machinist. But it was something new and he wanted to try it.

He liked the machine shop immediately — not just the skill training and the hands-on education, but leaving his home school for a new environment with new people and different rules.

VICA (Vocational Industrial Clubs of America) expanded Jeff's horizons further. He placed first in local, regional, and state skill Olympics and fifth in the national competition.

In his senior year he co-oped at Kolan's Custom Machining. Findlay, where the work varied from job to job and day to day and where he got the valuable experience of dealing with the public. He added to his skills with the *AutoCAD* class at the Findlay branch of Owens Technical College, Perrysburg, Ohio, and had started on a tool and die apprenticeship when he was hired at Honda's Marysville, Ohio, plant as a machine technician. There's a waiting list for jobs like his. Jeff feels that what happened to him “is kind of rare.”

Jeff loves his job in the machining division, where dies are machined, repaired, tried, and made ready for the production line. He's in a four-year program that will make him a senior technician, and he feels that further advancement will be limited only by his own skill and initiative — maybe someday team leader or coordinator. He may well spend his whole working career at Honda.

“Without that vocational training, I don't know where I would be today, but I don't tend to think about that too much,” Jeff says. “I've got too many other things to think about, like what to do next.”



“Vocational education was the right move at the right time. It brought me into the banking world,” says this assistant vice president of a Columbus bank.

As a junior in high school, **John C. (Jay) Barker** felt he'd already been there too long. His parents hoped he would finish school and go to college. Jay just wanted to get out and get started on a career.

In Newark, Ohio, High School's vocational program, he saw a chance to get some serious work experience. When he started work the summer of his junior year as a mail boy for Park National Bank, Newark, his career was under way.

Except for one year in the real estate business (“the longest year of my life”), Jay has spent the last 10 years rising steadily in the banking business. He continued to work at Park National after graduation, advancing from mail boy to teller to student loan assistant to merchant services representative while he earned his associate degree in business management from Central Ohio Technical College, Newark.

Four years ago Jay joined Society Bank, Columbus, as a sales representative, and the following year he was made the first sales officer in the Retailer Sales and Services department. Now an assistant vice president of the organization, Jay is responsible for Retailer Sales and Service for the Southern Region of Ohio, which includes Dayton and Cincinnati. Eleven employees report to him.

Jay credits his **marketing** courses and work experience for the concepts that made him a “natural” for the merchant services job: exposure to the financial services industry, sales techniques, and working with retailers.

“In vocational education, I learned what a retailer goes through. That gave me a perspective that was pretty unique when I got into the merchant business,” Jay says. “Vocational education was the right move at the right time. It brought me into the banking world.”



“Vocational education for me was kind of a clean break, a second opportunity,” says a former student. It has taken him to a technical college, the Sears Tower in Chicago, a seminary, and now to an associate pastorate.

As a freshman and sophomore at Perrysburg, Ohio, High School, **Lee Powell** had shoulder-length hair, an “attitude,” and not a clue as to what he would do with his life.

He chose electronics at Penta County Joint Vocational School, Perrysburg, mainly for a change of scene, and found himself bored with hands-on activity. Penta let him switch to **marketing**, and there he found his niche — working with people, communication, and public speaking.

A co-op job at Sears required Lee to get a haircut and to talk to people, selling first jewelry and then shoes. He liked it. He also ran for vice president in an association of eight schools’ marketing clubs.

“It was a thrill to get up there and do the public speaking and get elected,” Lee says. It was his first experience of being a winner.

He earned an associate degree in marketing at Owens Technical College, Perrysburg, Ohio. Sears promoted him to department manager, sales manager, customer service manager, and personnel manager and transferred him to their regional office in Detroit and then to the Sears Tower in Chicago.

Meanwhile Lee had gotten married and started to attend Grace Evangelical Church. There he began to feel that the ministry was the place for his skills.

“Marketing is just a means to get to where we can help people,” he says. He is now associate pastor at Grace Evangelical, completing his master’s degree in theology at Ashland Theological Seminary, where he had been able to work part-time on his degree while working for Sears.

“Had it not been for Penta County, I don’t know what would have happened to me,” Lee says. “I could have ended up just mediocre, unhappy.”



Susan says, "I wanted to be more marketable. I knew I could always go to college even though I went the vocational route."

Susan Edwards spent the first week of her junior year as planned: in the college preparatory program of Portsmouth, Ohio, West High School. She switched to the **stenography/word processing** program at Scioto County Joint Vocational School, near Portsmouth, when she took a realistic look at the jobs she could do to pay for her college education.

She recalls thinking:

"I want to be a little more marketable. I knew that I could always go to college even though I went the vocational route."

The clerical skills Susan Edwards learned in vocational school took her to college and then to Columbus, where her career has taken a decidedly non-clerical turn.

Her vocational skills led to a part-time job that she kept for many years, doing filing and other office work for a machine shop. As a vocational graduate, she went to work full-time for the Portsmouth City Schools and attended Shawnee State University at Portsmouth in the evenings, where she earned an associate degree in arts and humanities.

She earned her bachelor's degree in communications at Morehead State University in eastern Kentucky, where she used her business and public relations skills on an internship with the tourism office of the local chamber of commerce, becoming full-time tourism and Chamber of Commerce director upon graduation. A year later she moved to Columbus to be with her fiance, and signed on with a temporary agency.

A temporary receptionist assignment with Banc One turned into a full-time clerical job, and *that* led to a job as project manager in corporate communications. Now Susan is advancing again, this time to be Banc One's orientation trainer for new employees. No matter where her communications career takes her, she believes she will still use her vocational school skills every day.