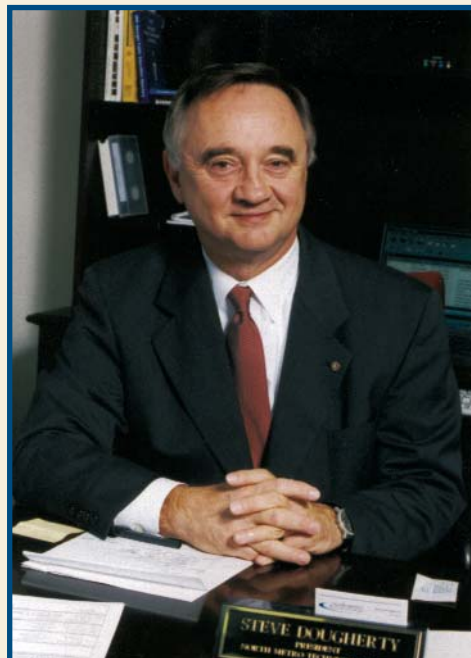


Meeting the Changing Needs of the Market

By Steve Dougherty
North Metro Technical College President



'We are very proud of our responsiveness to the needs of the job market in the community around us.'

– Steve Dougherty,
North Metro Tech President

Responding to the dynamic job market in local communities is at the heart of the mission of Georgia's Technical College System. At North Metro Technical College, this focus has been demonstrated by the recent development of two new programs: Radiologic Technology and Home Technology Integration. Both of these programs resulted from our listening carefully to local business and industry leaders in the North Cobb, Bartow and Southwest Cherokee County communities.

A great illustration of the way we respond to local industry is the development of the Radiologic Technology program (*for more on the program, see p. 14*). We became aware of the need for this program in our community through Mark Haney, an executive for WellStar Health System who serves on our local board. Through Mr. Haney, we learned that WellStar was finding it difficult to hire enough people in this high-demand field who did not already live in the immediate area. We also heard from the CEO of Cartersville Medical Center, who also serves on our local board, that the demand for radiologic technicians is growing rapidly due in part to the changes in imaging technology. This rapidly developing technology is becoming relatively cheaper, and thus more widely used. At the same time, doctors are using imaging technology more frequently to diagnose and follow up on illnesses and injuries.

We saw the need, and we responded.

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AN ONGOING
SERIES OF
EDITORIALS
BY THE
PRESIDENTS
OF GEORGIA'S
TECHNICAL
COLLEGES

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WellStar told us early in our discussions that creating a new, high-performance Radiologic Technology program was, in the words of one vice president, “a strategic imperative.” WellStar was willing to help fund the program initially, but they wanted assurance



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that we would have students enrolled by January of 2004. We at North Metro Tech made it clear that we thrive on that kind of challenge from our business and industry partners. With a huge amount of teamwork between the technical college and the health care system personnel, we met the goal when we enrolled 25 highly qualified students in the program in January 2004.

But there were obstacles. One of the first was the lack of space on the North Metro Tech campus in Acworth. Fortunately, WellStar was able to provide a classroom and key pieces of equipment at one of their education and IT support facilities. In return, WellStar will have an excellent opportunity to hire most or all of the nearly 90 percent of the first class currently on track to graduate from the program and become radiologic technicians. Given WellStar’s five hospitals and numerous clinics, this will be a big step forward for the system. This kind of collaboration has become a hallmark of Georgia’s Technical College System.

Another good example is the Home Technology Integration program that we recently started at North Metro Tech. It originated a little differently but involved

the same kind of careful listening to the marketplace. North Metro Tech has long had an outstanding Electronics program that has primarily served manufacturing plants in the area. We have been proud to help a number of industries in the area become much more efficient through better training of their machine operators and industrial systems technicians. But, as those plants have become more efficient, there are also fewer people who need that kind of specialized training.

Meanwhile, we have become increasingly aware of a growing need for technicians who can help consumers make the array of electronic products in the home work, and work together. This is the kind of feedback we receive from the program advisory committees that serve every major program in every technical college. In the case of Electronics, our advisory committee made us aware that many consumers are seeking help with the myriad of home computer networks, phone systems, security devices, home theater components, satellite and cable systems, and other electronic “gizmos” that abound in today’s market. Installing, configuring and maintaining these devices can be bewildering to the consumer unless he or she has a fairly extensive knowledge of electronics principles — and, as you might expect, most don’t.

Our Electronics faculty and advisory committee saw an opportunity to redirect some of their resources to serving consumers. Interestingly, I have personally had the experience of encountering one of our current Electronics students working in a local electronics store. I didn’t know he was one of our students but was already impressed with his knowledge of the products about which I was asking when he noticed the North Metro Tech logo on my shirt. He said he was a student in this program and told me how much he was benefiting from it. So I can personally testify that this kind of listening to the community and responding to needs works!

We are very proud of our responsiveness to the needs of the job market in the community around North Metro Tech. As we go about our daily lives and interact with the community, it is very satisfying to hear from someone who has encountered one of our students or graduates as he or she received help in a medical facility, advice on new technology or quality customer service. That’s how we know what we’re doing is really working. **R**