

FINDING THE RIGHT PARTNER

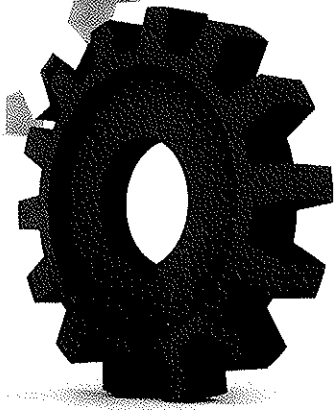
Ariens believes other manufacturers will become increasingly engaged in supporting educational initiatives as the demand for skilled workers increases, but he adds that employers need to choose the projects they support wisely.

"You want to be aligned with something that provides value, and I think it's hard for any of us to evaluate what's good in education," says Ariens. "In our case, we worked with Steve for a couple of years before we took the big leap of helping with hardware and equipment and the building itself. We had to get through the process of understanding what they were doing and trusting that this was something that would be sustainable for many years. School administrations and staff change over time, so how do we make sure the projects we're supporting have legs beyond an administrative change? That's not an easy question to answer. Ultimately, if you're involved in a project and you find you're not getting the results you need, you may have to sit down with the educators and work it out."

Most important, there has to be a good fit between the company's needs and the education program's goals.

"You have to understand what your company's culture is about and then find programs in the high schools or technical colleges that you can endorse, engage with and build around," says Ariens. "Then you can go to the next level, which is to fund some of it."

For Ariens, the Technology and Engineering Education Center is one part corporate citizenship and one part investment in the development of his company's future workforce.



"In the engineering trades particularly, we've discovered that if we can make it interesting for young people to get involved in the field, they're more likely to stay in it and become serious engineers and technicians," says Ariens. "There are even some studies that show that if you can get sixth graders involved it can carry through to high school and beyond, so it's almost never too early to start."

Mike Cattelino, associate dean of manufacturing, information and agriculture at Fox Valley Technical College, says the Brillion center can be a model for other business and education partnerships.

"Fifteen years ago, you would never have seen something like this happening, but as more manufacturers begin to feel the pressure of maintaining their workforce, they'll be looking for opportunities like this," says Cattelino. "You need to have the right people to pull it off, as they did in Brillion, but the value to everyone is really incredible, and it's crucial to the future of manufacturing. So, I think you'll see more partnerships like this, industries calling the schools and asking, 'How can we help?' Something like this is very expensive to operate and there aren't likely to be the funds available unless industry steps up." 🏠

For more information on the Ariens Technology and Engineering Education Center, contact Paul Nistler or Steve Meyer, Brillion High School, (920) 756-9238; W1101 County HR, Brillion, WI 54110.

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