Everyone who is familiar with the field of masonry knows that the industry has undergone a significant amount of change in recent years. The improved technology has been combined with proven techniques and has led to a drastic shift for the trade. These changes have permeated masonry from top to bottom, and have begun to influence workforce development efforts. Ultimately, the schools that will succeed in a competitive market are the schools that are able to effectively blend the innovative ideas with the experience provided by traditional techniques.

One of the schools that has proven successful in this field is the Center of Applied Technology-North. Their masonry program is one of the most respected educational programs in the industry, and has several facets that make this a unique training ground for some of the most prepared masons in the world. The Center of Applied
Technology-North stands as a model for how programs should be organized for decades to come. It excels in the areas of workforce development, skill development, and recruitment.

Workforce Development
Advocacy for the field of masonry is important. The best way to advocate for the future of a field is to develop a strong and talented workforce that will provide for the future of the field.

Experience Matters
The Center of Applied Technology-North has been open for over 40 years. During this time, the school has graduated countless students who have gone on to provide exceptional work in a wide variety of construction projects. One of the esteemed masonry instructors, Curtis Hoover, was in the first class when the doors opened in 1974. He has been an instructor for 24 years, providing valuable experience for students.
Connected With Established Business Partners

The program at the Center of Applied Technology-North has used this experience to create a strong reputation in the community. For the students graduating from this program, there are many jobs available by these business partners. Often, they become the future employers for the Center of Applied Technology-North students. Mr. Hoover stated that many of his students run multi-million dollar companies.

For example, Already Finished Concrete and Masonry takes students from CAT-North to perform internships. In addition to taking students, the programs donate almost all of the equipment that is needed to perform their hands-on projects. Mr. Hoover says that even though the students have built “storage sheds and garages,” he still gets “yelled at regularly because all of the extra donations take up too much space.” Most people would say this is a good problem to have.
**Advocacy For The Industry**

Students are also encouraged to participate in advocacy for their field. Every student is told about their ability to participate in SkillsUSA. This is a leadership organization for many learning about technical, skilled, and service occupations. The Center For Applied Technology-North has hosted the SkillsUSA competition that has occurred annually since 2000.

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**A Wide Variety of Programs**

Students can earn credit towards their certification in 23 different programs. This breadth of opportunities is unmatched in the field. Students have the opportunity to take classes in multiple programs in a way that makes their educational experience their own. These opportunities set CATN apart from the competition. Mr. Hoover said that the expansion of these opportunities over his 40 years at the institution has been one of the most attractive aspects about the school.

**Experience Outside of the Classroom**
One of the major shifts in the educational community across the board has been the drive towards earlier work experience. Ultimately, few students enjoy sitting in the classroom and work experience programs are available to CATN students. These work experience programs earn students elective credit in addition to providing a paid internship experience that will often translate into a job after graduation. Even prior to earning work experiences, much of the student experience is hands-on. When asked, Mr. Hoover directly stated that “3/4 of the class is hands on. They work on projects from day one.” Anyone can read about something but experience is the ultimate teacher.

Job-Hunting Made Easier with “Employability Skills”

The CATN program understands that professionalism is just as important as the on-the-job skills. For this reason, students have the opportunity to take an “employability skills” program. Here, students learn how to construct a resume, build a portfolio, and practice their interview skills. Mr. Hoover added directly that the “practice interviews are run by actual employers who provide feedback to the students.” This translates into a more competitive candidate for future businesses and employers.
The key to recruitment is to provide an educational program that caters to a wide variety of students. This will create an environment where students from all backgrounds can benefit and learn from everyone’s strengths and experiences while helping to cover for each other’s weaknesses. In this area, the Center of Applied Technology-North has several strengths:

*The program hosts students from seven local high schools and one alternative high school*

Because the school hosts students from seven different high schools, the program draws on students from a wide variety of social and economic backgrounds. This allows students to learn from people with significant differences from themselves. In fact, Mr. Hoover says it’s not unusual for students from other schools to “have played sports against each other [prior to arriving].” Once they arrive at CAT-North, “they all become one.” The sense of community is unique.

*The program provides students an opportunity to earn college credit*

Many students desire to translate their educational experience at this program into a college experience. The program provides students with the opportunity to earn college credit for satisfactory performance in their courses.

**Key Statistics: 2015-2016**

75% of seniors planned to enroll in a college program.

18% of seniors planned to attend a technical school.

The remained entered the workforce or the military.

*Students interact with faculty to shape their individual educational experience*

It is important that students are able to meet with faculty in an individual manner to shape their education in a way that best suits their needs. There is a healthy student support staff with eight teaching assistants that provide a conduit for students to voice their concerns and ensure that their input is taken seriously. The school even tracks the alumni to see where they end up and to see if they have any feedback on how to improve the program.
Shaping the Future of the Masonry Field

Ultimately, the Center of Applied Technology-North provides one of the most powerful educational experiences for the field of masonry and its future for a variety of reasons. They have spent decades training the best and the brightest students in the industry and this has translated to many successful businesses and companies run by their former students. This is the groundwork for the school’s future students because many of these students find internships with the school’s alumni. This means that their students earn valuable work experience before they even graduate from the program and makes them exceptionally competitive in the job market. Finally, because students are drawn from diverse backgrounds, this only makes their students even more well-rounded by the time they finish. This unique blend of essential ingredients has made CATN a leader in the masonry field and serves as an example for other programs.

WORDS: MASONRY MAGAZINE
PHOTOS: CURTIS HOOVER/THE CENTER OF APPLIED TECHNOLOGY-NORTH