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When Students Know Best

Couple wins contest on attracting youth to manufacturing jobs.
By Mateo Melero

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Sometimes universities seek out large companies to secure steady revenue for the institution – and at other times, students seek out large companies to pitch them ideas.

Cal State Northridge graduate students James McCloskey and Lillian Thiemens recently secured the first place \$7,000 award in a Winona, Minn. manufacturing company’s contest that sought strategies for attracting youth to manufacturing jobs.

“I like building things. I like designing things. So this was kind of right up my alley,” said McCloskey, a manufacturing systems engineering graduate student at CSUN with bachelor’s degrees in computer science and engineering.

McCloskey, 24, and his girlfriend Thiemens, 27, wrote an essay about how to generate an interest in manufacturing at an early age. Their three-tiered plan starts with introducing manufacturing to elementary students through the use of video games, then engaging them through after-school programs in high school, and finally recruiting the best and brightest from college.

“I did some reflection to kind of figure out what led me down this path,” said McCloskey, who noted his love for games like “Roller Coaster Tycoon” where the player builds amusement parks.

Steve Blue, president of contest sponsor Miller Ingenuity, which makes railroad parts, noted that the CSUN essay stood out because it flipped the initial question of how to best attract young people to the industry into how to best target them at a young age.

McCloskey and Thiemens were presented with their award Feb. 24 by Blue at a CSUN ceremony attended by school engineering faculty, family members and company executives.

Blue said the basis for the award stems from his personal mission to save U.S. manufacturing from decades of outsourcing and shifting generational interest.

“It just seemed perfectly naturally to us to have this contest where we could pick the brains of the people for the future of the industrial world,” Blue said.

– Mateo Melero

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