

# Education and Training

## Toolmaker Keys Variety of Community Efforts

By Rebecca Patrick

**S**pend five minutes with David Nixon and you readily see the passion he has for his community and its youth, as well as for the tool and manufacturing industry that his family-owned company, Nixon Tool, has been a part of for more than half a century.

He channels this enthusiasm in a variety of civic leadership roles, many of which share a common thread: education, be it for junior high and high school students or on-the-job training.

“I believe that properly educating our young people is so critical; it’s really a national security issue. What’s going to happen when we don’t compete out in the global marketplace?” he questions. “We’ve got to prepare our youth for something other than a minimum-wage trap.”

### Providing a path for students

For his part, Nixon has a longstanding involvement with the Boy Scouts and one of its divisions, the Explorer Post initiative, which promotes the teaching of careers to young people.

Two years ago, Nixon branched out from the Explorer Post and founded the Square 1 program for Wayne County to showcase to local students (and their parents) the various job opportunities available. The types of work featured in Square 1 cover 17 distinctive career paths, including computer information services, cosmetology, nursing, electronics and paralegal studies. Nixon heads up the Manufacturing Explorer Post area.

Square 1 is co-sponsored by the Richmond/Wayne County Chamber of Commerce, the Economic Development Corporation (EDC) of Wayne County and the Communities In Schools of Wayne County (a local chapter of the national organization that champions connecting needed community resources with schools to help young people successfully learn).

The program is for boys and girls in grades 8 to 12, and costs \$8 per student for eight weekly sessions. The group goes to a different business each time so the students see firsthand the range of different real-world careers they can pursue. For his Explorer Post area, Nixon focuses on product design, engineering, manufacturing, tooling, maintenance, supervision/management, human resources and quality control – matching the appropriate companies up with each topic for the on-site experience.

“The kids learn a lot in eight weeks; we profile about 80 jobs,” Nixon reports. “The EDC also provides us with a survey on wages and benefits to share, so the kids and parents can see what type of money – a good living – can be made from some of these jobs.”

The local Ivy Tech Community College is also an important piece of the Square 1 puzzle. “They have representatives attending each session to talk about what Ivy Tech classes are available that match up to the different jobs they’re seeing performed,” Nixon explains.

“Often times I hear from kids, ‘Oh, I couldn’t do that.’ No, they can’t, but they can certainly learn, which is what I tell them, and we show them the steps necessary to get to that job level.”

The Square 1 program can also help remove other job misperceptions. “For instance, there’s a stigma associated with vocational education (for machine/manufacturing careers) of it leading to work at a greasy, dark, dirty place,” Nixon asserts.

“That perception keep a lot of people from being interested in it, but if you get students out to those type of businesses and let them see what’s actually going on, they say, ‘Oh, my gosh. That’s not what I thought it was!’ ”

In addition to his work with Square 1, Nixon is on the

**Nixon Tool management consultant (and former president) David Nixon is a Richmond mainstay when it comes to community involvement.**



advisory committee for the machine tool programs at three area high schools: Connersville, Lincoln in Cambridge City and Miami Valley in Ohio. "The job placement rate for students coming out of these programs is over 80% and most times it's 100%," Nixon states.

"It's really worth the battle to fight for these kids to have some opportunities and create an avenue for success, so we try to get involved in a lot of those kinds of activities."

### The workforce and the workplace

When it comes to employees, the buzz word around Nixon Tool is "training." Its workers are a mixture of established professionals and those who have come through the company's apprenticeship program, which usually has two or three participants annually. With its apprenticeships, Nixon Tool pays for an associate's degree and supports four years of on-the-job learning.

Outside the company, David Nixon does his best to "support anyone who believes in workplace training." One such example is his participation in the Gateway Training Partnerships, a grassroots effort by a group of large employers in the five-country region to train people on the kind of skills required in their companies to stay up to date.

"The group contracts with Ivy Tech to hold classes on whatever kind of training a company feels it needs assistance with," Nixon offers.

Also on the workforce front, Nixon has spearheaded an endeavor that focuses on keeping businesses in Wayne County. Five years ago when he was chairman of the local chamber board of directors, Nixon approached the mayor with an idea. There was a business set to close whose service was one that Nixon believed other companies in the community could provide that would keep the associated jobs in town. Nixon organized a tour of these businesses for the mayor and county commissioner.

At the end of the tour, the mayor asked Nixon, who has relationships with many local businesses because of the machine maintenance his company provides, to continue similar ones on a regular basis.

The result: monthly visits, with representatives from the local EDC, chamber of commerce, Urban Enterprise Association and city council joining the mayor and county commissioner.

"I make all of the arrangements with the companies and facilitate the visits, which last two hours each. We have a brief presentation, do the tour and have lunch together to exchange ideas," Nixon states. "I made it clear to the mayor from the start that I have no political agenda in this. It's for the businesses and the government and organization leaders. I'm just here to get the ball rolling."

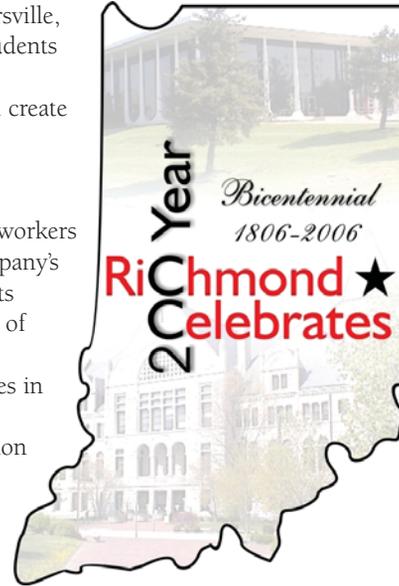
He says there are two types of businesses targeted for visits. "We have those that are facing challenges, so hopefully ways to assist them can be identified, and those businesses that have some serious opportunities – for expansion or otherwise, but could use some advice or help to get the word out."

### Community pride

The Nixon commitment to civic duty also extends to festive pursuits. David and his wife, Beverly, are co-chairs of the Richmond Bicentennial celebrations taking place throughout 2006. Featured events are "The Great Race," which includes automobiles 25 years and older driving along U.S. 40, and three summer parades – highlighted by the "Moonlight Parade" at night.

When thinking about his long history of community involvement, Nixon reflects on how society itself has changed.

"People don't join things like they used to. They don't want to commit their evenings to outside activities, but everyone can't have that attitude," he declares. "So, we keep on doing it and adjust where needed to make things happen."



Nixon Tool's apprenticeship program provides participants with on-the-job training and an associate's degree.

#### INFORMATION LINK

**Resource:** Nixon Tool at (765) 966-6608 or [www.nixontool.com](http://www.nixontool.com)