



Paul Perkins

He's a Workforce Warrior

By Symone C. Skrzycki



Paul Perkins emphasizes the value of work-based learning at the Indiana Chamber's 2018 Spring Board of Directors meeting.

Machinery buzzes. A screen displays colorful 3D images. Paul Perkins, president of Amatrol, is leading an animated tour of the shop floor.

“We design and build hands-on technical training equipment for teaching skills in manufacturing and energy industries primarily,” he explains. “We work with high schools, colleges and universities, and industries as well, to provide tools.

“Another major part of our business is interactive multimedia learning. We develop simulations and courses that are online, and we work with schools to use that as an alternative to a textbook.”

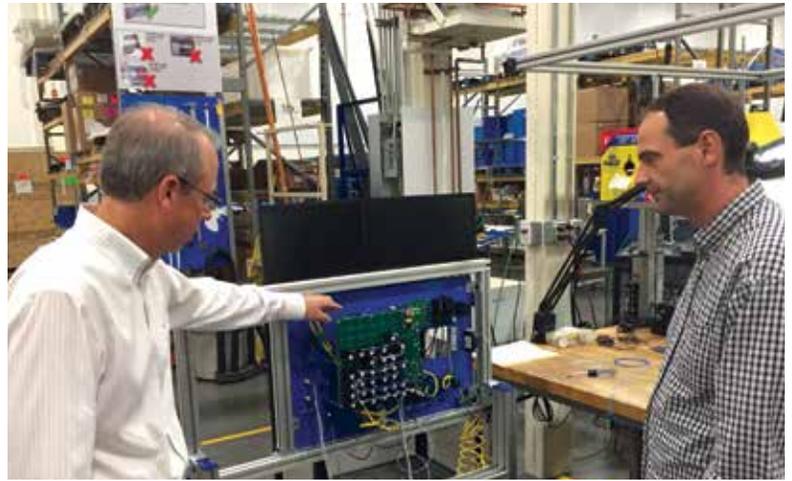
Perkins is passionate about workforce education. He's engaged in a variety of initiatives – locally, statewide, nationally and internationally.

“Workforce development is one of these areas where, it's got bipartisan support,” he reflects. “There are a lot of people that think very differently about a lot of other things – that are very like-minded about what we need to do here. Sometimes it's for different reasons, but more and more, we all realize that we have to have a highly skilled workforce if we're going to expand the economy. And if we expand the economy, there are more jobs and that's good for people.

“The big thing is getting both students and parents exposed to the opportunities in technical career fields because we don't have enough people going into these fields. And when you consider how much most of these jobs pay and some of the good opportunities that are there, it's got to be because we've got a gap between the information and the people. That's just one of the areas we have to make a huge change in if we're going to change the workforce character.”



Perkins: "I think Indiana's challenge – (and) our greatest opportunity – is actually going to be in the secondary area in building career and technical education."



An engineer at heart, Perkins discusses machinery with a team member. Amatrol employs approximately 200 people and has developed training materials in 16 languages.

Striving to make a difference

Based in Jeffersonville, Amatrol has clients throughout the United States and in 48 other countries.

"It's in the developing countries where a lot of this (training) is needed," Perkins offers. "I'll be going to Ghana next week. I like going to these places because there's so many things to learn about their culture, and it's an opportunity for us to make an impact."

In 1981, Perkins co-founded Amatrol with his parents and brother, building upon the industrial automation systems manufacturing organization (Dynafluid) his parents started 17 years earlier. Perkins' father, Don, encouraged getting involved beyond the workplace.

"My dad's always been a very community-minded person and civic-minded individual," Perkins shares fondly. "He kind of started our family down that path. When I took over as president (of Amatrol) in 2008, I was handed the prime responsibility for community engagement. I was already doing a lot before that, but I expanded it. It's been a good thing in so many ways."

Perkins takes the philosophy to heart.

Nationally, he serves in leadership roles with organizations such as the Manufacturing Skill Standards Council, American Technical Education Association, Coalition for Career Development and workforce component of the National Governors Association.

In 2018, Perkins was appointed to represent the business community on the newly created Indiana Governor's Workforce Cabinet

"Serving in volunteer capacities with different organizations, you get a chance to see the world from a different viewpoint," he emphasizes. "When you sit on a board with people from a lot of different organizations that are leaders and are very successful in their work – just hearing how they think and how they approach a problem – it's a great professional development experience."

"And that's one of the reasons why I tell people volunteering should partly be about doing something to give back to the community, but it's also a great professional development experience. You'll be better as a person in your own role and your day-to-day professional life if you do things in volunteer capacities."

Chamber collaborations

Perkins became more aware of the Chamber nearly 20 years ago when he needed assistance with a state education policy impacting the

workforce. He joined the board of directors in 2004. Today, he is a member of the Executive Committee, chairs the Workforce Development Policy Committee and is part of the K-12 Education group.

Bill Waltz, vice president of taxation and public finance, calls Perkins the "go-to source on all things workforce in Indiana."

"I first met him several years ago," Waltz recalls. "I quickly learned he's an unassuming and unselfish guy. Here's a man running a large, expanding business who must travel across the country and globe much of the time. But I'd see him in Indianapolis quite often participating in a meeting or event related to improving the workforce environment in Indiana."

Perkins says his involvement with the Chamber has been "one of the best experiences I've had in community service. It's the opportunity to make an impact on our state's direction. The Chamber is highly regarded by our government leaders and the opportunity to shape policy – or at least recommendations that they take very seriously – has been a great opportunity."

"I think our state's going in a very good direction right now. The state Chamber has been a major influencer of that."

Working and discovering

Every year, more than 2,000 domestic and international visitors tour Amatrol's 120,000-square-foot facility. They learn about the equipment, which teaches students how to troubleshoot, operate and program.

"I really believe in work-based learning," Perkins declares. "I was a co-op student when I went through engineering school. I worked a quarter, went to school a quarter and alternated back and forth until I got through. It helped me. I think I got better grades. I was more engaged. It took five years instead of four years to get a bachelor's degree, but it was a better result."

Perkins' voice is full of emotion as he describes why his dedication to workforce education is so rewarding.

"We work with a whole range of people, but there are a lot of people that have a huge need to have a better life. Getting training to get into a better job can make an impact on them, their families, their kids. It has a long-reaching impact. So, the opportunity for us to be able to create products and programs, and know that we can help people in our own community and in other parts of the world, is a tremendously satisfying thing."