



## NEWS AND HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SKILLSTRAC PROGRAM

### Finishing the Race



**Mike Root (far left) shares the moment as Thad Simpson, Richard Kirby, and Tim McDonald (left to right) of Norcold proudly display their certificates for completing the Green Level.**

Imagine what it feels like to run in a marathon. As you start out, the end of the 26.2 mile course seems so far away, almost unreachable. Since it's not a sprint you have to pace yourself. You are definitely in it for the long haul.

Along the way, as you

strive toward your goal, you are encouraged with people cheering you on, clapping as you go by, offering water to refresh or sustain you.

Finally the end is in sight. You did it!

The employees at Norcold in Sidney and Gettysburg, Ohio who have

just begun their final level of certification for SkillsTrac have been in a marathon of their own. Norcold, an affiliate of Thetford Corporation, is the leading manufacturer of refrigeration products for the RV, marine, and trucking industries. Since beginning in SkillsTrac in April 2008, the employees in the program have survived through reductions in staff and shift eliminations in this increasingly difficult economic environment. Yet most of the original nine participants have continued to progress; six are ready to begin the Blue Level, including one that is still laid off, but is determined to make the most of this training opportunity.

Much of the success of the program can be attributed to the

commitment of the staff at Norcold. The decision to enroll their maintenance technicians in SkillsTrac was a result of a need for more advanced skills. The management staff took the time to create a detailed program outline that included what Norcold would expect from the participants and what they as a company would provide.

“Time spent in labs would be paid, and they would be permitted to take up to two hours a week away from work to complete the online portion of the program,” Lori Geuder, HR Assistant, explained. “Pay increases that would be awarded at completion of the certification levels were also detailed. A four-page FAQ section was created to address

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### Portion Pac Begins Program

The next time you're at a ball game and grab the little packet of mustard for your hot dog, think about where that packet is manufactured. Chances are it comes from Portion Pac, a division of H.J. Heinz located in Mason, Ohio. Those little packets are just a

few of the “portion control products” this facility manufactures.

And just like the rest of the manufacturing industry, their processes and equipment are keeping up with the latest technology to be more efficient. That means training to maintain that

equipment has to keep up too.

To satisfy their need to upgrade training for their maintenance employees, Deanna Chafins, Human Resource Manager at Portion Pac, turned to her contact in

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## A Recipe for the BLUES



**Instructor Keith Barga (center), Joe Hoy (left), and Christopher Thomsson (right) watching the load arm extend.**

**“Confidence is built by being prepared,” explained Mike Donovan, SkillsTrac Instructor**

1. Take six individuals from six different organizations (or former organizations, in the case of two that are dislocated workers) with different skill levels in industrial maintenance.
2. Mix them with instructors who have spent hours, along with input from others, creating the top level of the multi-level SkillsTrac training program.
3. Add time—approximately four weeks, 4-5 hours a day—spent in the lab to pilot the training.
4. Adjust as necessary.
5. Stir in excitement from all involved.

**Results:** Six Blue Level Certified individuals who can impact an organization’s downtime and the final version of the SkillsTrac Advanced Level III (Blue Level).

From late August through early October, six individuals participated in the pilot program for the SkillsTrac Blue Level. Their backgrounds and skill level were diverse.

Most of the students had some experience in maintenance, but one student, Joe Hoy, a dislocated worker from DMax, had no maintenance experience at all. When he learned about SkillsTrac, he thought it would be a good opportunity to advance his skills and increase his chances for employment in a demand occupation.

Chris Thompson was also a dislocated worker, from GM at Moraine. Although his background included maintenance and repair, he believed SkillsTrac would enable him to not only brush up on his skills but also learn new ones at a higher level than before.

J.R. Shelton is a former maintenance technician working as a temp. He shopped around for a program that would fit his niche and stretch him beyond his current skill level.

The other three students—Jeremy Rentz of St. Marys Foundry, Jim Wilson of F & P, and Jeff Stueve of Precision Strip—all are in maintenance, although Jeff is relatively new to the position. Some mentioned financial incentives they were awarded upon completing levels of the program. Jeff was interested in the college credit he would earn towards a degree pro-

gram. All six students were excited about what they were learning and how they envisioned their training helping them in their jobs and careers.

Led by instructors Mike Donovan and Keith Barga, the program was fine-tuned and finalized. The excitement of the students was contagious and confirmed to them that the SkillsTrac program increases the confidence level of its participants.

“I heard a coach say confidence is built by being prepared,” Mike Donovan explained. “Watching the excitement in these students as they get to hone their skills using the equipment tells me they will be able to tackle problems with increased confidence. That translates into real cost savings for organizations in reduced downtime due to the of improved proficiency of these folks.”

Sounds like a prize-winning recipe for success for everyone!

**Christopher Thomsson looks for the switched input for the load arm extended.**



## The Marathon Continues...

Issues and concerns that were sure to come up. We wanted everything laid out before we asked for commitment from the individuals that would be in the program.”

For the training to be a success, management knew their own buy-in was critical. They continued to provide support throughout. Lori’s role as the training administrator was easy because of the support she received from the staff, checking on the participants’ progress, keeping them active, and answering their questions.

It appears that their commitment paid off. Mike Root, Maintenance Supervisor at Norcold, stated he has noted a higher level of confidence in his maintenance technicians in what they are doing. “Even the way they approach troubleshooting is different. They use a more systematic approach than they did before,” Mike stated.

## Portion Pac

Workforce development at Sinclair Community College, Brenda LaTanza. She directed Deanna to SkillsTrac.

The convenience of online learning in particular appealed to Deanna. “The employees are able to go through the program from home, with minimal time away from their jobs,” Deanna stated. “For us, it’s

“Safety issues have been reinforced as well,” Mike continued. “In every area of the program, everything started with safety. It was a great way to remind us all how important it is to be safe first and foremost.”

Although more experienced technicians in the program felt the first few levels were a little too basic for them, they did feel that they were still able to get benefit from those modules. Later modules increased their areas in skills such as welding, machining, and working with more complex PLCs.

Norcold believes that it was important to continue investing in its employees, even through difficult financial circumstances.

As the economy swings up again, if Norcold should be in need of additional maintenance technicians, they would look favorably on applicants who have completed the SkillsTrac program. “We look for people

more cost-effective than traditional training.”

Portion Pac enrolled 32 maintenance employees in the SkillsTrac program, most of them in August of this year. As they progress through the levels and achieve certification, they will be rewarded with pay increases. And when they complete the entire program, they will have



**Mike Root recognizes Dwight Schroer for completing both the Green and Yellow Levels of SkillsTrac.**

with a two-year degree in a maintenance or technical program. Anyone with a SkillsTrac certification would be highly desirable,” Mike stated.

For now, the marathon continues for the Norcold technicians. By the end of January 2010, they will cross the finish line, achieving certification in all five levels of SkillsTrac. We congratulate them and the staff at Norcold for their commitment and perseverance!

“Anyone with a SkillsTrac certification [is] highly desirable.”  
-Mike Root, Maintenance Supervisor at Norcold in Sidney, Ohio



earned a Journeyman’s card in Industrial Maintenance from the Ohio Apprenticeship Council.

Deanna is excited about what the SkillsTrac program offers Portion Pac and its employees.

“We hope this program will further develop our employees to take the next step in their careers. It’s a win-win for everyone.”

Certifying the Advanced Manufacturing Workforce



SkillsTrac



Sinclair  
Community  
College



SkillsTrac is an innovative, comprehensive regional training network that brings advanced manufacturing skills to employers and individuals in Western Ohio. Designed and developed in partnership with area manufacturers, SkillsTrac provides certification in high-demand skills.

SkillsTrac is the product of a partnership comprised of Edison Community College, Upper Valley JVS, Sinclair Community College, Wright State University—Lake Campus, and the Ohio Job Center Network.

To contact a provider in your area, go to [www.skillstrac.com](http://www.skillstrac.com) and click on Training Partners.

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## From the director



**Ray Lepore, SkillsTrac  
Program Director**

As we quickly approach the end of our Community Based Job Training Grant, it seems appropriate to talk about what we have accomplished, to look down the

road at what's next for the program, and to express our thanks to all for your participation in SkillsTrac.

In the two years since the training began, the consortium has accomplished quite a bit:

- Nearly 350 total training participants
- More than 200 from 23 organizations are currently active

- Over 275 Green, Yellow, White, and Red certificates earned
- Pilot of Blue Level lab training completed
- \$1.5 M spent on training grants for companies and equipment for the schools to deliver the training

SkillsTrac Phase II begins in January. It will be a fee-for-service program, supplemented with training grant money from various sources. The curriculum will become more flexible, modular, and subject-oriented. Tooling U will continue to provide online content and we will continue to enhance the labs, keeping them rigorous and relevant. Eventually more content with labs in different areas, such as facilities maintenance and energy management, will be added to the

SkillsTrac collection.

On behalf of the school partners, I would like to thank our students who have devoted their time and effort to learn the material, do the labs, and earn the certificates; our employers, who have worked with us to enable the program to work for them and who have allowed their associates to participate in the training; and our local Job Center and economic development people, who have supported the program from the beginning. This has been a gallant effort on everyone's part and we are grateful to have been able to work with such a great community of people. As we move forward, the effort will continue.

Until next year,

*Ray*