One college prepping next crop of oil, gas industry workers

While the oil and gas industry has been booming for years now, the supply of qualified laborers and employees to fill these new jobs has not kept up with the demand. Lackawanna College, however, is changing that in the Appalachian Basin region.

School’s development

Lackawanna College identified the technical human resource needs of the oil and gas industry early in the development of the Marcellus Shale exploration. While the oil and gas industry typically financed and sponsored some oil and gas technology programs to meet industry needs in the western U.S., the college forged ahead as a private institution to build a program from scratch, establishing the Lackawanna College School of Petroleum & Natural Gas in 2009. The school itself sits atop the Marcellus Shale in New Milford, Pennsylvania, and has a curriculum shaped by the companies that are drilling all around it.

“We based the curriculum on petroleum and natural gas technicians’ and technologists’ skill sets,” said Richard Marquardt, who is the executive director at Lackawanna College’s School of Petroleum & Natural Gas. “We took the sector of skill sets that reside between petroleum engineering and basic engineering and vocational-technical school, and we filled that sector. That’s our special sector. It’s totally focused on the oil and gas industry — engineering, midstream, etc.”

Distinguishable attributes

The school is also focused on maintaining and strengthening its reputation as being a nationally recognized, first-in-class program in the field of petroleum and natural gas technology. It has a selective and competitive admissions process, as well as a strong internship and job placement program. Moreover, the administration and faculty boast exceptional academic credentials, extensive previous experience and skills to manage and support a program of the highest caliber.

“By endowing Lackawanna College, we want to ensure local students from the community go to the school, get a first-rate education and then come out and work in our growing energy industry,” elaborated Nicholas “BJ” Cline, district superintendent at Cabot Oil & Gas. “They don’t have to go through a six-month training program.”

“The oil and gas industry plays a very significant part in the shaping of our curriculum,” explained Marquardt. “We seek feedback and input from them on a regular basis.”

Not only does the school seek feedback from the oil and gas industry on a regular basis, but it is also the beneficiary of a $2.5 million private donation from Cabot Oil & Gas Corp. In April, Cabot Oil & Gas presented the gift to the school in which $1 million of it is an endowment and $1.5 million of it is dedicated to the purchase of state-of-the-art equipment, training, staff and faculty development, and student interactive experiences and internships.

“The oil and gas industry plays a very significant part in the shaping of our curriculum,” asserted Cabot Oil & Gas’ Director of External Affairs George Stark. “Lackawanna College is unique,” asserted Cabot Oil & Gas’ Director of External Affairs George Stark. “Lackawanna College has a long history in this region. We’re proud to partner with them. Education is critical. One of the benefits of having the industry partner with Lackawanna College is the curriculum the students will be taught is what we’re employing in the field today.”

And the school has over a 90-percent articulation rate into the industry with more than 70 percent of the school’s graduates hired by major E&P companies. The graduates also work in the Marcellus Shale and Permian Basin regions, as well as North Dakota, according to Marquardt.

“When Lackawanna College’s School of Petroleum & Natural Gas students come out of the college, they’re ready to go to work,” said Stark. “It’s the perfect match at the perfect time. The jobs we’re creating are going to be generational. The opportunity is long term; the future is bright.”