

FESS and Aero-Safe celebrate 10 years

By Melinda Cheevers, Staff (Fort Erie - Jan 16, 2009)

Brian Pennimpede wanted to be a mechanic. His father was a mechanic and it seemed like the natural thing to do.

However, once the Fort Erie Secondary School student participated in a co-operative education placement at Aero-Safe Technologies as part of the manufacturing and co-operative education partnership they have set up, the idea of being a mechanic "went out the window."

"Before my co-op placement, I did not know that this would be what I wanted to do," said Pennimpede. "I guess being a mechanic just wasn't to be."

The partnership celebrated its 10-year anniversary on Tuesday, Jan. 13 and sees students from FESS who show an interest in precision machining as a career path learning hands-on in the manufacturing plant.

The students job shadow skilled trades-people, learning about the machines and then later use them to manufacture their own student projects.

Pennimpede said the co-op placement made him very interested in the field and he now wants to pursue a job as a machinist. He's not the only one who was inspired by the program.

According to FESS, 40 per cent of the students who have participated in the program and achieved their diplomas are currently working at Aero-Safe Technologies as skilled-trades people or apprenticeships.

Sean Horner is one of those people. The 22-year-old former FESS student participated in the program in Grade 10 and completed a coop placement in Grade 12.

After graduating in 2004, he was hired to work in the factory that same summer and has been there ever since.

"The program got me interested," he said. "Before I was involved in it I didn't know what a skilled-trade was."

FESS manufacturing teacher, Paul Bernier, said that the unique program is the only one in Canada that he knows of.

"It's been a success because (Aero-Safe) were kind enough to open their doors to us," he said. "You go through an apprenticeship and you have a job for life."

Bernier also credits the school's administration with making the program such a success.



FESS students past and present, as well as employees from Aero-Safe gathered together in celebration of the 10 year partnership between the school and the manufacturing plant. Tony Rodway, President of Aero-Safe, pictured front and centre, said that the program is a unique partnership that aims to promote skilled trades as a career choice.

"They have allowed me to prepare the students specifically for Aero-Safe," he explained. "While staying within the provincial curriculum, I'm able to prepare them for going into the plant."

The unique program has won several awards in its 10-year run: the Business and Education Council of Niagara Community Partner Award in 2001, and The Ives Landry Foundation Award for Innovative Secondary School Manufacturing Technology Program in 2003.

Bernier has also received two teaching awards, both in 2004, one regionally and the other provincially.

Tony Rodway, President of Aero-safe Technologies said that involving the youth is the key to success.

"We get the chance to get these guys at a young age and show them opportunities for the future," he said. "These young people are our future, as long as we give them the tools to go on."

For Pennimpede, who finishes school this year, the future is looking a little brighter and more clearly defined.