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Education

Brownson Technical School

Brownson Technical School, a private vocational school located in Anaheim, Calif., has been training and placing individuals in the field of heating, ventilation and air conditioning/refrigeration (HVAC/R) technology for 24 years.

When Don and Bill Brown opened Brownson Technical School in 1984, their training focused on appliance repair and residential and commercial HVAC/R. As times changed, along with needs of the industry and increased technology, so did the courses offered at Brownson Technical School.

The school currently offers three different programs in the HVAC/R field covering technology in the areas of domestic/residential, commercial, industrial and Direct Digital Controls along with planning and design using AutoCAD.

One of its programs meets the education requirements to proceed in the Local 250 union apprentice program.

According to Bill Brown, director, the last five years Brownson Technical School has grown steadily. "For the last three years we've doubled our business from the year before in terms of students and gross revenues," Brownson says. "We'll probably run close to 200 students this year, up from 100 last year."

Brownson says that there's a tremendous need in the industry for qualified and educated technicians. "As the economy slows down it's going to shake loose a lot of real talent," he notes. A weak economy provides opportunity for private schools to train out-of-work employees in a new profession. "From an employer's point of view this could be a golden age," he adds. "I know on the residential side, new construction is hurting, but the commercial and facility maintenance is going well."

Brownson's focus is on add-on repair contracting and commercial and industrial work. "Our emphasis here is on commercial buildings under 100,000 sq. ft. and residential air conditioning systems," he says. "It's where the numbers are in terms of placement, need and demand in the economy, though many of our students will go on to work on large chillers and things like that."

Brownson prides itself on an intensive hands-on concentrated curriculum. "Students will work on equipment at school that they will be working on in the field. We try to create real life situations that our graduates may be confronted with when employed in the field," Brownson says. "We continuously work with contractors and suppliers to get equipment donated to us or we purchase it ourselves to ensure our students gain ample hands-on experience."

The make-up of the student body varies greatly.

Currently the majority of the students attend full-time day classes. Some of these students are comprised partly of recently laid off workers looking to change careers. These mature and experienced workers may come from the real estate and manufacturing fields and are looking to get into an industry that will keep them employed.

"As California transitions from a manufacturing base there's a steady bleed-off of workforce that end up at our doorstep because HVAC is highly compensated work," he says. Some of these students recently graduated high school and are looking for traction in the job market. "These students have been some of our best raw material," Brownson says.

"They're young and going to be in the job market for a long time." A large percentage of the part-time evening students already are employed in the industry but are looking to improve their skill set to advance their career. Some simply want to get a good paying, rewarding career.

As a private vocational school, Brownson is mandated by regulations to be very active in placing its graduating students within the job market. To make sure its students are as up-to-date on new technology in the industry and insure that they're viable in the job market, Brownson has an educational advisory committee made up of some of the same people on the Institute of Heating and Air Conditioning Industries, Inc. (IHACI) education committee, such as Scott Johnson, John Dalton and Scott Strong.

One of its best success stories is former student Scott Johnson, who went on to make an incredible impact on the HVAC industry in California. In 2005, Brownson Technical School awarded Johnson with the first (and so far only) "Industry Achievement Award" for his tireless efforts in pioneering achievable energy efficiency for the HVAC industry.

Brownson Technical School owns the 20,000-sq.-ft. building they occupy in Anaheim. "We are in the process of remodeling and expanding our labs and classrooms," says Brownson, "we expect to be done with renovations by January 2009. At that time, we'll be able to handle between 300 and 400 students a year."

Once the facility is maxed out in Anaheim,



L-R: Don and Bill Brown, Brownson Technical School.



Clockwise from top: student Tom Roberts holding gauges, lab instructor Steve Loya and student Richard Garcia, with back to the camera.

Brownson hopes to expand with branches in the Inland Empire and the San Fernando Valley.

"The main thing that differentiates Brownson from other vocational schools is our relentless emphasis on a hands-on education," says Brownson. "It is my cross to bare because of liability issues, expense and clutter, but I want our school to resemble a shop. I want it to resemble the world that our students will be going into."

Employees seeking highly trained workers that should be able to get up to speed very quickly are encouraged to call the school to get resumes from graduating students (714) 774-9443. There is no charge for this service to employers.