

Sargento Prompts Schools to Look at ‘High Tech Ed’ Industry 4.0 Classes Raise Bar in Industrial Arts

By Ed Byrne
The Brillion News

HILBERT – High school used to be all about getting top students ready for college. Now there’s also attention being paid to students who want to head right into the job market after high school.

Now the new slogan in education is “college ready, career ready, life ready” – with options besides college getting attention.

Into this picture enters Sargento Foods, the largest employer in the Village of Hilbert.

School Superintendent Tony Sweere said Sargento is the catalyst, working with schools in northern Calumet County and pointing them to a new program designed to help high school students make a successful transition to the workplace.

Sargento approached several area schools about its partnership with LAB Midwest, a Mequon company that works with schools and industry in a variety of initiatives.

One is called Advanced Manufacturing and Mechatronics; others are Industrial Grade CNC and Robotics, 3D Printing Using Composites and Metal, and Drones and Autonomous Vehicle Technology.

“I would see a couple of these things being introduced into our tech ed area,” Sweere said. “I think it brings more legitimacy to our tech ed area.”

Sweere said Hilbert, Brillion and Stockbridge schools want to work with Sargento on the program; Chilton and Reedsville chose not to participate.

Sweere and incoming Hilbert High School Principal Nathan Wesener went to Mequon to meet with LAB Midwest.

Sweere told the school board that tech ed students would take four classes. All of them teach students about cutting-edge industrial technology.

The program would have students at the participating high schools taking these classes for high school credit, but they would also bring technical college credit.

The program outlines four classes, which Hilbert would add to its curriculum as four one-semester courses.

They are called Industry 4.0 Fundamentals Courses and consist of

- Course 1: Introduction to Mechatronics
- Course 2: Introduction to Industrial Control Systems
- Course 3: Introduction to Industrial Robotics
- Course 4: Introduction to the Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT)

LAB Midwest is already working with Gateway Technical College, and will be working with Fox Valley Technical College, Northeast Wisconsin Technical College, and Lakeshore Technical College.

“You’re giving kids a different viewpoint, a different look at what’s going on in industry,” Sweere said.

He calls it a better version of traditional high school industrial arts classes.

“Sargento picked us [because] obviously they’re looking for workers, skilled workers,” Sweere said.

He said Sargento is already working with schools closer to Milwaukee who have committed to adding the Industry 4.0 Fundamentals Courses to their industrial arts curriculum.

Some schools in The Big East Conference will be introducing the four courses into their industrial arts curriculum starting with the 2020-2021 school year.

The benefit for the schools is that a lot of the specialized high-tech equipment that students need to learn about in order to be ready for a career in manufacturing is in the jobsite at Sargento’s Hilbert production facility.

LAB Midwest has developed the training curriculum.

“They have smaller versions of all of this stuff,” Sweere said. “Our kids are going to get industrial certification.”

The program is already operational in the Milwaukee area, and has proven itself, with several industries hiring people right out of high school because they already have the skills the employers want.

“To me, it gives our kids another option,” Sweere said.

He said he envisions Hilbert, Stockbridge and Brillion working together with Sargento to bring the program into both high schools’ technical education curriculum. Sweere believes Reedsville will be interested, after they have completed the transition to a new superintendent.