ECOTECH INSTITUTE

By Russ Willcutt

With Wind Energy Technology among the eight academic tracks on offer, this entity is focused on training the renewable energy workforce of the future.

FOR "GREEN" COMPANIES and concerns, Colorado's embrace of renewable energy and sustainable practices provides fertile ground for growth. That was a primary factor behind the Education Corporation of America's decision to base its first Ecotech Institute in Aurora, which is within the Denver metro area, according to Michael Seifert, president. "We began operations in June of 2010 with 52 students, and we're now up to 462 and growing," he says. "We attribute that, in part, to being located in an area with such a passion for green growth and supporting the entrepreneurial spirit."

While many hail from the surrounding area, national marketing efforts have resulted in classes filled with students from California, Iowa, Tennessee, New Jersey, and other states. In addition to its Wind Energy Technology program—a two-year track resulting in an associate's degree for graduates—the institute also offers Electrical Engineering Technology, Environmental Paralegal, Renewable Energy Technology, Sustainable Interior Design, Energy Efficiency, Environmental Technology, and Solar Energy Technology.

"We sought employer input when we were developing the curriculum for all these programs, including Wind Energy Technology," Seifert says. "It was created to equip graduates with a solid foundation in the fundamentals of renewable energy with an emphasis on understanding the generation and transmission of energy using wind power. Our modern facilities and labs, alongside our small class sizes, really give students the opportunity to apply general theory in real-world applications."

Providing this input—both during curriculum development, and on an ongoing basis—as members of the institute's advisory board are: Abbas Ghassemi, Ph.D., professor of chemical engineering at New Mexico State University and executive director of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) and WERC: A Consortium for Environmental Education and Technology Development; Alden Zeitz, director of North American operations at the DeWind Co.; Colin M. Coyne, managing principal at the Coyne Group and LEED 2.0 accredited professional lecturer of sustainable enterprise at the Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University; Craig Mataczynski, chief executive of Renewable Energy Systems Americas and chairman of Ecologic Analytics; Declan Flanagan, president and CEO of Lincoln Renewable Energy LLC; Ghazi Darkazalli, Ph.D., president and CEO of Marian Court College; Janelle Kellman, an attorney with the Pacific Gas and Electric Company; and Timothy Callahan, a partner at the Paul Hastings law firm.

"These individuals and others have gone out of their way to assist with our strategic planning and also to reach out to our students," Seifert says. "We've had panel discussions, for instance, where students were able to ask members of the advisory board questions about their industry, and also about the roles they'll be expected to play once they've completed the program."

Ecotech's career services department also plays a role in identifying internships and helping students develop the "soft skills" they'll need to land a job, including writing effective resumes and being prepared to impress during the interview process. Job leads occur as a result of the institute's close relationship with business both in Colorado and around the country, which also involves conversations about the exact skills that companies need potential employees to possess.

Naming benchmarks of which he is particularly proud, Seifert lists the fact that Ecotech Institute is nationally accredited by the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS), which is listed as a nationally recognized accrediting agency by the United States Department of Education and is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). He also mentions Ecotech's recent classification as a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Gold Certified facility, which is a particular honor given the institute's mission. As a longtime expert in academic administration, however, an upcoming event tops Seifert's list of accomplishments.

"We will graduate our first class in the Wind Energy Technology program this June," he says, "and that is the ultimate goal for any educator. I am very proud of what we've been able to achieve for our students so far, and I look forward to building our enrollment, programs, and reputation in the coming years. We want to partner with companies involved in all sectors of the renewable energy market, particularly wind, and I welcome queries from anyone who's interested in supporting our work."

Call (877) 326-5576 or go to www.ecotechinstitute.com.