James Lenzen
Assistant Director, Northeastern Junior College

WHAT ARE YOUR DUTIES?

I handle everything from recruiting to teaching and everything in between.

NJC IS LOCATED IN STERLING, COLORADO. HOW MUCH WIND ENERGY IS GENERATED THERE AND WHO ARE THE MAIN PLAYERS?

What sets NJC apart is the large amount of wind energy that is close to use. We have nine sites operating within a 100-mile radius of the campus and two more sites being built this summer. As of 2012, there are 10 wind companies/employers operating these sites. There are over 800 MW and another 200 MW being added this summer. The biggest player here is NextEra Energy and GE, but Vestas, Invenergy, enXco, Mitsubishi and BP are all operating sites near us. We have great relationships with the companies and they have been a tremendous help in our success, each company has a representative that sits on our advisory council.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE COURSES A STUDENT CAN EXPECT?

We offer a diverse curriculum ranging from basic electrical to hydraulics. The students will also take preventative maintenance, industrial problem solving, and wind turbine systems. About half of our classes deal with electricity, electronics, control systems, and programmable logic controllers. These concepts are the hardest to understand and the most important when it comes to safety in a wind turbine. Electricity is the one hazard that you cannot see and is the easiest to mitigate if you follow the right procedures. The students will also complete several rescue scenarios every semester to keep the skill set up to date.

All our students start our safety course in the fall and have to pass with 90% before they can continue on into the remainder of the program. I was a safety trainer for NextEra Energy before coming to NJC and I take safety very seriously as do our other two instructors.

DO STUDENTS HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO GAIN HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE?

Our students all get up a turbine during their time here. As a freshman you are looking at 60% classroom time and 40% lab time because they do not have the fundamentals of electrical, moving machinery, or hydraulics to keep them safe. Their lab time is spent mostly on simulators. Moving into the sophomore year things tend to get more hands on. We have an advanced lab with trainers that we built, and we dive heavily into schematics, component functions, troubleshooting and the 'why' factor. Why did this break? We have duplicated some of the most complex problems that we faced as technicians to challenge our students and make them think.

HOW MANY STUDENTS HAVE ATTENDED OR COMPLETED THEIR ASSOCIATE DEGREE REQUIREMENTS?

The last graduating class in May 2012 was 17 who all achieved their AAS degree and 14 of the 17 went on to take jobs in the industry. We are very proud of this but at the same time we understand that the student is the most important person to us and we keep our classroom size to a minimum of 22, which gives our students the best opportunity to succeed and gain the most from each instructor.

DO ALL INSTRUCTORS HAVE A BACKGROUND IN WIND TRAINING?

Jason Hazlett is the director of the program and he has two years with NextEra Energy working on GE 1.5 SLE's & XLE's. Neil Browne was a former GE technician and has a strong teaching background. I was a five-year tower technician for GE and NextEra Energy at Peetz, CO, which is just north of the school. During this time I was in charge of all climb & clearance training that went on at the Peetz site. I am certified by GE, NextEra Energy and Siemens in multiple rescue devises and was a certified rescue trainer for NextEra Energy. I was also a technician and fixed and performed maintenance on towers daily. I have worked on GE 1.5 SLE's & XLE's, Siemens, and Vestas towers. I was fortunate enough to be able to be on loan to Siemens for a summer and became familiar with the Siemens 2.3 turbine.

WHAT IS THE COST FOR THIS PROGRAM?

A typical semester is around $5,000 for tuition, fees, books, room and board. Since NJC is a residential junior college, we offer everything that you would expect from the larger four-year institutions except our programs are typically only two-year associate degrees. We offer more than 80 programs of study in both the career and technical areas and in transfer programs.

For More Questions and Answers with James Lenzen visit windsystemsmag.com