Spotlight on HARPER COLLEGE

RSES is first and foremost an education and training organization. It is the goal of *RSES Journal* to provide readers with the best possible information on the HVACR industry so that they can go out into the field with the most up-to-date knowledge available. That is why *RSES Journal* is starting a new column called Head of the Class where we will spotlight HVACR tech schools. It is our hope that by showcasing these schools we can bring more attention to the education and training side of the industry and bring more people to the industry.

This month we feature Harper College in Palatine, IL. It is one of the largest community colleges in the U.S., serving more than 35,000 students in Chicago's Northwest suburbs. One of Harper's mainstay programs is HVACR, which provides the training and skills necessary to build a successful career while learning in a state-of-the-art facility. *RSES Journal* recently sat down with Program Coordinator Jose A. Vital to learn more.

Jose Vital mentors a student in the HVACR lab.

RSES Journal: What makes you different from other HVACR schools?

Jose Vital: The structure of Harper's HVACR program is the only one of its kind in Illinois. Along with traditional lectures and lab assignments, the program offers an "open entry" format that allows students to register for a course at any time during the semester. Upon completion of a course, a student may immediately enroll in the next. That flexibility, especially for those who work full time, allows students to complete their degree or certificate in a fraction of the time required by a traditional format.

The program's emphasis on competency ensures students successfully perform hands-on training to industry standards with the support and supervision of qualified instructors who have extensive experience in the HVACR field. The lab is open 50 hours a week, including Saturdays, to accommodate students' schedules and let them move at their own pace.

In addition to an Associate of Applied Science degree in Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Technology, Harper's program includes five certificates: Domestic Refrigeration and Heating, Heating Service, Refrigeration Service, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Service, and Residential Comfort Systems.

RSES Journal: Does your college provide any assistance or training after graduation?

JV: Harper students are in high demand as a result of its rigorous program and extensive relationships with area employers. Harper's Job Placement Resource Center and I work with local businesses to establish job opportunities, and service managers regularly visit our students. Over the past several years, more than 95% of program graduates have found employment in a related field.

After graduation, individuals continue to have a range of options to sharpen their skills. Harper Business Solutions, for example, provides companies with specialized and customized training. Harper also offers credit for prior learning for individuals

<< A student works in Harper's HVACR lab.

with industry experience and industry certifications such as the Refrigerant Handling Certification and the Universal R-410A Safety Training Workshop.

RSES Journal: What kind of on-site tools do you have for your students?

JV: Harper's program provides all the tools and materials students need to complete their hands-on training in a state-of-the-art facility. The HVAC lab features more than 70 pieces of major equipment including residential gas fired furnaces; air conditioning systems; boiler hydronic systems; refrigeration trainers; commercial walk-in refrigerators; ice machines; commercial rooftop units; and geothermal systems.

RSES Journal: How does your school work with RSES?

JV: Harper's HVACR program is believed to be the first RSES School Corporate Member, and we continue to value that partnership. We have hosted meetings of the RSES Chicago chapter and inform students of the organization's training and services. RSES consults with me on industry developments and marketing ideas, and I write articles for their publications. We also opened up our lab to RSES so it could perform testing on combustion analyzing sensors.

RSES Journal: What value do you see in RSES certification?

JV: When I began my career about 25 years ago, I had to rely on RSES for most of my industry training. Back then, programs didn't feature the kind of sophisticated facilities and resources you see today. My RSES certifications remain valid today and I still apply them. Organizations like RSES are essential to the industry—they provide continuing education to help technicians stay current with industry trends.

RSES Journal: How can students get involved in your program?

JV: Prospective students can visit harpercollege.edu or email admissions@harpercollege.edu. The program also regularly holds information sessions about degree and certificate options, courses, financial assistance, scholarships and HVACR's vast career opportunities.

RSES Journal: What can be done to attract more students to the HVACR industry and close the HVACR skills gap?

JV: Most people still see HVACR as a handyman type of industry and don't realize the science, mathematics and technical training that it requires. I think we need to increase marketing, educate counselors and continue to build industry partnerships to expand awareness about the robust job market and earnings potential.

RSES Journal: What else should we know about your program?

JV: To keep up with industry trends, Harper is currently constructing three Buildings Energy Systems Technology (BEST) labs with the support of Daikin, Carrier, Trane and Thermosystems. They're slated for a spring 2018 completion. The BEST program will focus on the latest residential and commercial wireless, ductless and ecofriendly technologies used in HVACR and building automation training.