

# CENTER FOR

Student Abbie Parton works with a table saw in the wood shop of Maker Space, which is part of the new Purdue Polytechnic Anderson Flagship Enterprise Center in Anderson. The 94,000-square-foot, \$14.5 million facility opened in August 2017.



# Success

MULTIUSE FACILITY HOUSES STARTUPS, DEGREE PROGRAMS,  
AUTOMATION LABS

*Story by Jason Zasky // Photos by Jeff Adkins*



*Once upon a time,* the economy of Anderson revolved around General Motors (GM), which employed 25,000 people across several plants. When GM left town around the turn of the century, it was a catastrophic development that forced locals to ask: “How do we re-invent ourselves?”

“All the strategic partners and stakeholders got together and said, ‘Let’s create an organization with local, regional, state and federal connections, one that will spearhead the development that goes on in the area,’” recalls Chuck Staley, CEO of the Flagship Enterprise Center (FEC), a nonprofit organization and public-private partnership that helps facilitate new development in the region.

“We have done a great job of attracting new companies,” Staley says. “In 1995, there were very few

international companies in Madison County and almost none in Anderson. Today we have 20 international companies, including the North American headquarters for a Japanese company.”

Meanwhile, the FEC has also helped countless local companies get their businesses off the ground, providing microloans and technical assistance.

“We are the second-largest Small Business Administration microloan lender in the nation,” he says. “We have done about

\$15 million in loans to small companies, with over 50 percent of those companies owned by women, minorities or veterans. What we have to concentrate on now is creating a workforce that’s ready for 21st century manufacturing.”

## **FLAGSHIP EAST**

The effort to better prepare the local workforce took a quantum leap forward in early 2017 with the opening of the Center’s Flagship East campus, which houses Purdue Polytechnic Anderson, automation labs, the 12,000-square-foot Maker Space, and office space for startup companies like Go Electric Inc., which builds large energy solutions for commercial, industrial and military customers



that keep them energy-secure and energy-efficient.

“The new facility has allowed us to expand and offer more degree programs and to double-down on our learn-by-doing mission,” says Corey Sharp, director of Polytechnic Anderson. “Most of what we offer are bachelor degrees in engineering technology, IT, supply chain management and organizational leadership. These are all STEM degrees that lead to high-demand, high-wage jobs.” Sharp notes that the facility’s state-of-the-art labs and equipment will make a big difference in preparing students to enter the workforce.

“If you look at the list of majors, those are the skills that employers need for today and for the foreseeable future. It’s a match between what we have to offer and

what the region needs,” says Barbara Alder, director of the Office of Engagement at Purdue University.

As a result, Polytechnic Anderson now has the largest number of full-time students in the school’s history.

*“We are the second-largest Small Business Administration microloan lender in the nation.”*

call us and we do not have enough students to fill the job opportunities that are coming our way. At all levels in technology and manufacturing there is a shortage of folks that are leaving school with a STEM degree.”

— Chuck Staley, CEO, Flagship Enterprise Center

“We’re on a very positive trajectory for more enrollment growth over the next five years,” Sharp says, also noting that there is a surplus of jobs available to graduating students. “Companies

## **BOILER BANG**

In part, this explains why Polytechnic Anderson is partnering with other organizations in an effort



to encourage young people to pursue or develop an interest in STEM. Consider, for instance, Boiler Bang, a seven-week program in which students in grades 6-12 — most of whom will be first-generation college students — can work in Flagship East's wood shop and also work on a robotics project in the facility's

robotics automation lab.

Meanwhile, yet another collaboration involves working to develop a robotics and training facility at the MadJax space in Muncie, Sharp says.

Students currently enrolled in Polytechnic Anderson's degree programs have the unique opportunity to take classes

and complete internships under one roof. They also have a chance to develop relationships with potential employers while giving the startups in the building the opportunity to get to know potential employees.

"Now that we are literally on the other side of the door of Purdue Polytechnic, we have the opportunity to work with students and also tap into some of the professors who instruct the students," says Lisa Laughner, president of Go Electric, Inc. It couldn't have come at a better time for her company, which she expects to quadruple in size over the next five years.

All the new partnerships and relationships are exactly what interested parties had in mind when they conceived Flagship East.

"The new facility is helping to attract students and companies and it's a springboard for economic development and innovation," Alder says. "It will ultimately help generate new companies, new wealth, new jobs and all the things that go into making a region economically robust."

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Student Lucas Gibbons works with a vertical mill in Maker Space, which is part of the new Purdue Polytechnic Anderson Flagship Enterprise Center.

