

HVACR

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Serving the Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning and Refrigeration Industry in Arizona

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New AAI HVACR program to graduate first class in November

By Leah Holt
HVACR Today

Because Maricopa County, Arizona, is home to some of the fastest growing communities in the country, industry leaders realize that there will continue to be a strong need in the area for those with HVAC training. In response to industry needs, the Arizona Automotive Institute (AAI), which since 1968 has provided its students training in automotive and diesel technology and autronics, began offering a new program in HVACR in January 2004.

A year before committing the time and money into starting a new program, AAI

staff conducted market studies and consulted labor statistics to discern projected opportunities in the field. "We found out there is tremendous growth and continued growth in the industry," says AAI Executive Director Alan Kluger. Part of an eight-school system, AAI also borrowed information from the three sister schools that already had the program. Finally, they reached out to the industry.

"We felt it was important because we have a professional advisory committee of people in the field—distributors, contractors, HVAC companies—who indicated there was an unmet need," says Kluger.

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Louis Hobaica, of Hobaica's Refrigeration Company is a member of AAI's Professional Advisory Committee.

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"Since there was a void we looked into it and developed what we feel is a very comprehensive program."

That program includes two options: one is a four-phase, 10-month program leading to an HVACR diploma; the other is a six-phase, 14-month program in advanced HVACR leading to an occupational associate's degree. "Which program students pick depends on the amount of time and money they have available to invest in the program," says AAI Director of Education Joe Wilson. Once a student earns his or her diploma, he or she can come back at a later time and take the two additional courses required for the degree.

Four courses are required in the diploma program—Air Conditioning, Electrical Systems and Controls, Heating and Heat Pumps, and Refrigeration. Each encompasses 80 lecture hours and 80 laboratory hours. The two additional courses leading to the degree—Advanced Heating and Air Conditioning and Advanced Refrigeration—each include 100 lecture hours and 100 laboratory hours.

Both programs incorporate general education components into the four basic courses. The 40-hour courses include Fundamental Math, Technical Math, Customer Service, and Business Communications.

According to AAI, the general education component is critical. "Students need a good mathematical base and need to be able to talk to customers and communicate their needs," says Wilson.

Cesar Martinez, 25, has been a student in the HVACR program since its beginning. He will earn his diploma on November 8 along with the program's first graduating class. On deciding to attend AAI, he says, "I wanted to do something different than what everyone else was doing. The industry is really going to need people in Arizona, and I am looking for that kind of job stability."

One of AAI's greatest assets is its instructors. According to Director of Admissions Mark La Caria, the school's four HVAC instructors have over 120 years of field experience, and many have between 10-15 years of teaching experience. Instructor and program coordinator Richard Jones has a Ph.D. in electrical engineering, has spent over 50 years in the industry, and has been teaching since 1968. He was a part of AAI's HVACR program from the beginning, contributing his expertise in setting up the program, putting together the curriculum, and bringing in industry contacts.

Chris LamYuen, 26, will graduate from the program in April. He decided to attend AAI after being impressed by a tour conducted by Jones. "I liked that I would be

part of one of the first classes, and that the class sizes are small and there's a lot of one-on-one time with the instructors," he says. "They help place you with companies, and Mr. Jones has major company guys come in and help too." LamYuen hopes to work for a few years and then start his own HV business.

Another strength of the program is the laboratory equipment available to students, all of which is right on campus. "Our lab is one of our greatest selling points because we have brand-new equipment," says Kluger. Manufacturers including Rheem, Carrier, Lennox, and Trane donate many of these demonstrators and trainers because the companies "appreciate that we're turning out trained, skilled, and competent technicians," says Kluger. Adds Jones, "Having units from different manufactures exposes students to the different specialty parts on the equipment."

The students enrolled in AAI's HVACR program include both beginners just out of high school, and those with several years of experience in the field. However, all must have a high school diploma or a GED or equivalent. Two out of the current 60 students are females, but "the interest for women in the field is growing, and there are many opportunities for females," says Wilson. "Many of our board members have

female employees," he adds.

Students enroll in one course at a time, each of which meets Monday through Thursday. Students can choose to take classes in the morning (7:00-12:00), afternoon (12:30-5:30), or evening (6:00-11:00). Tuition includes all lab fees and courses, materials and uniforms. Students also receive a tool kit—estimated by Kluger to be worth around \$1,200—to use in class and in the field.

After graduation, students have the preparation necessary to take the Refrigeration Service Engineers Society (RSES) technician certification exams. AAI will pay for a student's first four certifications if he or she passes the exam. Students can also go on to the University of Phoenix to earn a Bachelor's degree, as credits from AAI can be applied to management degrees at the university.

New classes begin every ten weeks; November 10 is the next start date. Prospective students may either walk in or call to set up interview with admissions staff. During the interview, they also take a tour, and decide which program is best for them. Those interested in enrolling in AAI's programs can call (623) 934-7273 or toll free (800) 528-0717, or can visit the school at 6829 N. 46th Avenue in Glendale.