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“It showed that our tenacity was working, and we were doing what was needed by our community.”



– Steve Saucedo of NMJC, on his school's leading New Mexico in workforce training



**RIPPLES IN
SEISMIC**



**Oxy Arrives
With a Bang**

Don't Train in Vain

Steve Saucedo's grassroots training coordination services have enabled his Hobbs, N.M., outfit to compete with the big boys.

By Chase Beakley

Saucedo saw an opportunity... to impact his community.

Steve Saucedo's voice has a warmth and tempo found only in men who recognize both the importance of their work and their own aptitude for it. As he describes his work as workforce training coordinator at New Mexico Junior College, each of his sentences ends with an upward inflection flush with positivity. He cites facts and figures with the confidence of someone who learned them for a purpose, not purely for recitation, and speaks with the comfort of someone who feels right at home.

Born and raised in Hobbs, Saucedo is right at home at NMJC. Saucedo's father worked in the New Mexico oil fields for 30 years, and Steve, coming up through the Lea County school system, learned about the cycles of the oil business in addition to history and math. After finishing school and working for College of the Southwest for several years, Saucedo came to work for NMJC in the Workforce Training and Outreach Department and put that homegrown knowledge to use.

When he took over as Workforce Training Coordinator in 2007, NMJC

offered only 10 training programs, each with lackluster enrollment. But even during the financial crisis that set in shortly after he accepted the post, he saw an opportunity to not only expand the programs but to impact his community. "I went from preschool all the way up through college right here in Hobbs," remarked Saucedo. "So I know that people still need to train even when things are slow. The industry is cyclical so I wanted to be ready when things picked up."

As the economy emerged from the Great Recession, Saucedo and his team were ready when demand for their training programs skyrocketed. He struck up a relationship with the oil and gas certification company TEEX to offer a variety of training programs, including heavy equipment training, safety certifications, and CDL test prep in addition to non-oil industry programs like workplace Spanish and leadership.

TEEX operates its own training sites across five states, but most are located in major cities like Houston and Dallas. In the early going, Saucedo noticed that a lot of Permian Basin

companies were spending time and money sending their employees out of town for training, and thought of a way to eliminate that cost. He reached out to TEEX and found industry leaders who could provide the same high-quality training locally. Now NMJC offers more than 70 different TEEX workforce training programs, making them the largest host site outside of the TEEX headquarters in College Station.

Jeff McCool, vice president of training and outreach for NMJC, was surprised at how quickly the workforce training department grew. "Obviously, we felt the potential was there for growth, but we certainly didn't have any idea it would take off this much. It took several years and a lot of hard work on Steve's part to develop a network of customers and the strategic roadmap for this department."

One of the keys to that growth was responding quickly and proficiently to the needs of regional businesses. "We don't decide in some meeting what courses we want to offer," said Saucedo. "Our courses are based strictly on demand." In order to respond to demand, you have to have a finger on the pulse on the industry and Saucedo's lifelong connection to Hobbs

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has provided him with the contacts necessary to do so. "You learn by being out in the community and listening. These guys know their business better than I ever will, so I listen to them," said Saucedo.

Social media marketing, constant brainstorming, and relentless promotion have allowed Saucedo to develop those crucial relationships. He's served on the board of oil companies, as well as in the Chamber of Commerce, and he takes any opportunity to pass out business cards and build up his digital Rolodex. Now when executives need a specialized training program, they know whom to call to set it up.

"I'm proud of what we've done, and where we're headed..."
Saucedo

For example, when Training Specialist Ray Greebon was looking for a place to send URENCO employees for nuclear safety and HAZMAT training, he found NMJC frequently listed as a top local resource. He connected with Steve via the TEEX partnership and has sent dozens of employees to him since. "URENCO sends employees for the OSHA and nuclear regulatory training programs and Steve has been a trusted advisor and training coordinator for many of those courses," said Greebon. "Our staff considers him a valuable academic liaison."

In addition to maintaining a deep list of business contacts like Greebon, Saucedo has also built up a cadre of industry experts to serve as his program instructors, a group that's vital to the thrift and flexibility of the program. NMJC contracts out all its instructing jobs so they don't have any resident instructors on their books. This keeps the cost of the programs low and also allows them to be flexible when companies call up with unique requests.

About half of the training programs take place in Hobbs at NMJC's training facility and are open to any-



one who pays the course fee, but the other half are custom-tailored by Saucedo and his staff and take place on site, wherever business owners need them. When Saucedo gets a call to provide a customized training course, he has to connect the business with the right instructor, and oversee the development of the curriculum to make sure the business's needs are being met.

Whether the training is taking place at NMJC or onsite, Saucedo likes to stop by to make sure the instructors have what they need and to introduce himself to the trainees. He might pop into a class to share a funny story and always tries to leave his door open for both the instructors and the trainees themselves. But the growth that NMJC has experienced wouldn't have been possible with just a bubbly socialite at the helm. Saucedo also has serious ambitions.

"He's got a passion for helping people achieve their goals, and works hard to position NMJC as a leader in workforce training," said McCool. Last year, NMJC did just that, ranking number one statewide in people trained, hours offered, and companies served, beating out schools in bigger markets like Albuquerque and Santa Fe.

"That felt good," recalled Saucedo. "It showed that our tenacity was

working, and we were doing what was needed by our community." The numbers for 2015 aren't out yet but Saucedo expects to lead in all three major categories again, and when you consider that behind those numbers are hundreds of people that now have a better looking resumé and higher prospects of landing a job, it adds up to a significant impact for the Permian Basin workforce. "I'm proud of what we've done, and where we're headed," he added.

Almost every conversation comes back to the community. He talks with pride about his people and his home, and he's got plenty of ideas about how to get things moving again. Looking to the future, he plans to diversify the training programs offered to extend well beyond the oil and gas industry, but he's not shying away from those programs either. He knows the rhythm of the area and he plans to make sure that NMJC, Hobbs, and the whole Permian Basin are ready when things get moving again, just like he did before.

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