



# *A Renaissance for Chicago's West Side*

## **Austin Polytechnical Academy builds community support for advanced manufacturing**

By Ingrid Gonçalves

**A**ustin Polytechnical Academy (APA) is only a year old, but Chicago's only manufacturing-focused high school is already making an impact with its vision for advanced manufacturing as a vehicle for community development and economic reform.

On October 18, Austin Polytech hosted its first West Side Community Development Town Hall and Symposium to raise awareness about advanced manufacturing. Earlier in the year, the school was featured in the *Wall Street Journal* and received a welcome endorsement from then Democratic presidential nominee and now President-elect Barack Obama, who supports the creation of similar schools around the country.

"Thanks to a partnership with a number of companies, a curriculum that prepares students for a career in engineering, and a requirement that students graduate with at least two industry certifications, Austin Polytech is bringing hope back to the community," Obama remarked during a late summer campaign stop in Dayton, Ohio.

Austin Polytech is a project of the Chicago Manufacturing Renaissance Council (CMRC), a partnership of government, business, labor, education, and community leaders aiming to make Chicago the global leader in advanced, high value-added manufacturing. IMA Board member Glen Johnson of Oakley Millworks has been involved from the beginning. Johnson and the IMA were instrumental in the establishment of the Austin Polytech program.

After completing a successful first year, including a ninth-place finish at the FIRST Robotics Midwest Regional competition, Austin Polytech is poised to spread its message about advanced manufacturing to the community.

The recent symposium called "Advanced Technology, Training and Leadership in Advanced Manufacturing: A Renaissance for the West Side," held in partnership with the Digital Development Council and Oversight Committee (DDCOC), featured interactive engineering workshops for students and panel discussions on community development, new technology, and career opportunities.

The event drew city-wide attention, with government, community and business leaders participating on the panels and in the audience. Speakers included Illinois State Rep. Deborah Graham (D-Chicago); David Hanson, CMRC co-chair and commissioner of the city's Mayor's Office of Workforce Development; Fred Hoch, president of the Illinois Technology Association; Ron



Daly, former president of RR Donnelly Print Solutions; Alex Lyons, DDCOC board member and president of Zephyr Global; and Dan Swinney, CEO of Austin Polytech and executive director of CMRC and the Center for Labor and Community Research (CLCR).

In the "Manufacturing and Community Development" panel discussion, the CMRC unveiled a proposal to create a Wind Energy Research and Development Center on Chicago's West Side. The center would focus on the booming utility-grade wind turbines industry. Commercial-scale turbines represent the next trend in wind energy, but current technology is still in its infancy and requires extensive research before it becomes economically viable.

The Wind Energy R&D Center would be rooted in the local economy and guided by a vision for community development. Based on the "cluster" business model, the center would act as an anchor for a cooperative renewable energy industry that would attract new investment and help build a green economy in Chicago. The center also would help revive manufacturing and rebuild communities on the West Side.

In the last 25 years, the number of manufacturing jobs in Chicago's Austin neighborhood has plummeted to 3,000 from 20,000. The lack of job opportunities in the area has pushed



30 percent of Austin residents below the poverty line. The symposium promoted advanced manufacturing as a way to reverse the damage done by deindustrialization and build strong, sustainable communities.

"Austin Polytech was the first step," said Swinney, "and this symposium is the springboard for an economy based on hard work, creativity and innovation, the production of complex things, and high-road partnerships between business, labor, community, government and education."

APA students will have a head start in the race to the top. This year, as part of the After School Matters program, students will con-

tinue to learn about the demands of owning and operating a manufacturing company by producing a soft drink from start to finish at Goose Island Brewery. The school's industry partners are forming a Manufacturing Advisory Committee composed of leading professionals who have agreed to share their expertise with students. In preparation for National Institute for Metalworking Skills (NIMS) electives, plans to build a metalworking shop are under way. NIMS electives allow APA students to earn industry recognized certifications, opening doors to well-paid and exciting careers in advanced manufacturing.

Austin Polytech has inspired the creation of the new Center for Polytechnical Education (CPE), a not-for-profit organization dedicated to replicating and developing the Austin Polytech model. Chicago Public Schools has granted CPE approval to open another school, the Chicago Academy for Advanced Technology (CAAT), in the fall of 2009. CAAT will train students for careers in information technology, an increasingly important sector in our economy. ■

*Author and photographer Ingrid Gonçalves is director of communications for the Chicago Manufacturing Renaissance Council. For more information about Austin Polytechnical Academy and the Chicago Manufacturing Renaissance Council, visit [www.austinpolytech.com](http://www.austinpolytech.com) and [www.chicagomanufacturing.org](http://www.chicagomanufacturing.org).*

## You can help . . .

### Become an Austin Polytech industry partner

Your company can help by providing internships, summer jobs and mentoring to APA students. As a partner, you will also enjoy access to recruitment and training programs through the Chicago Manufacturing Renaissance Council.

Fundraising and resources for Austin Polytech are coordinated by the Center for Polytechnical Education (CPE). Donations to CPE support key positions and activities that aren't provided by Chicago Public Schools, such as the industry liaison who develops partnerships with businesses and the director of community programs who generates family and community involvement in the school.

CPE currently seeks mentors and coaches to help APA's robotics team compete at the highest level. Financial and personal support from IMA member companies is critical to building world-class schools to train the next generation of talent for world-class companies.

For more information about partnering with Austin Polytech, contact Chuck Simpson at 773-278-5418, ext. 24, or [csimpson@clcr.org](mailto:csimpson@clcr.org). If you would like to support CPE, contact Dan Swinney at 773-278-5413, ext. 13, or [dswinney@clcr.org](mailto:dswinney@clcr.org).