

# STAYING AT THE TOP OF THEIR GAME

*As the wind energy industry continues to grow, training an adaptable, high-tech labor pool is essential to keep up with rapidly evolving technology*

By Shawn Lamb  
Ecotech Institute

**T**he wind energy industry is the tip of the spear when it comes to fulfilling the societal needs for renewable energy. Wind energy has been a key factor in the United States and European Union's plans for lower carbon emissions, and will continue to increase in prominence as the latest developments in technology continue to drive the cost of electricity down.

According to Ecotech Institute's Clean Job Index, a database on clean jobs and other sustainability factors that affect the United States, jobs in wind energy are expected to grow 22 percent between 2010 and 2020.

"Wind is proving to be a cost competitive energy source on its own. With the growth potential we are forecasting, it would be difficult to be anything but upwardly mobile in a career in wind energy," said Walter Christmas, a wind energy technology instructor at Ecotech Institute.

But this growth, paired with the ever-changing list of trends and challenges in wind energy, requires an expertly trained high-tech workforce. Technical colleges, like Ecotech Institute, are

tasked with staying on the cutting edge of technology while preparing students to enter a workforce that desperately needs them.

"When we see our graduates get job offers before they even graduate, that is a good indicator the industry is growing," said Auston VanSlyke, a wind energy technology instructor at Ecotech Institute.

## **GROWTH AND TRENDS**

Many wind energy sites have come online this year. This is the type of growth that leads to increased hiring both in operations and maintenance positions, as well as management for facilities. The wind energy industry has also seen a move toward more specialist positions related to sub-systems and component diagnosis and repair.

"These are high-level technician jobs working closely with system engineers to monitor components such as gearboxes, generators, frequency converters, vibrations and oil analysis," VanSlyke said.

The industry has also seen growth in offshore wind turbines, with the Department of Energy announcing another round of funding to three offshore pilot

projects. The complexity of offshore wind will accordingly add complexity to the technology, commissioning, operation, and maintenance of these multi-megawatt power plants.

In an industry that is constantly and rapidly changing, keeping up with the latest technological advancements is one of the biggest challenges professionals working





Photo: Ecotech Institute

in wind energy face. Implementing new methods and systems means learning new solutions for troubleshooting. When it comes down to it, downtime equals money, and the more you understand why a turbine faults, the better your bottom line will be.

Christmas cited the Voith hydrodynamic variable-speed gearbox used by DeWind, the

double-fed induction generator and frequency converters, and the electric (variable frequency drive) pitch systems as just a few examples of the latest technology to gain prominence in wind energy.

But the rate of change is ultimately a good thing, as the industry tirelessly works to find new innovations in wind energy

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technology. In the coming years, Christmas expects improving gearbox reliability will become a focus — a development that would reduce downtime during major component replacements.

And the need for these innovations matters not only to engineers, but also to every professional within the industry.

“As talented as the industry’s engineers are, often the simplest

and most effective solutions stem from ideas created by technicians. It makes sense that the people who work closest to the machines should generate some creative solutions,” Christmas said.

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#### PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE WORKFORCE

Identifying the skills needed for wind energy technicians is an on-going process. The industry often looks to resources like the National Renewable Energy Lab’s *National Skills Assessment of the U.S. Wind Industry* and The American Wind Energy Association (AWEA) *Operations and Maintenance (O&M) Recommended Practices*, to pinpoint what abilities and knowledge are needed.

Even when an aspiring wind technician leaves a college like



Photo: Trae Swofford



Photo: Trae Swofford

Ecotech Institute, this is only the beginning of their training. They will then be trained on the turbine specific technology by the OEM or an on-the-job trainer. This learning cycle can last many years before a true level of technical competency is achieved on these highly automated wind power plants.

Advancements in technology are still outpacing even the best field technicians' ability to keep up. Often, wind energy companies need to hire training firms to keep their employees abreast of the latest faults and how to troubleshoot them.

To prepare individuals to enter this work environment, education programs for wind energy must focus on state-of-the-art technologies in its trainings and labs. Ecotech Institute makes it a priority to expose students to skillsets such as supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA), PLC programming, advanced pitch systems, advanced converter theory,



Photo: Ecotech Institute

communications, power electronics, power equality, torque and tensioning tools, and the latest in climb and rescue techniques.

But most importantly, aspiring wind energy technicians must learn how to learn. To the uninitiated, the first day of on-the-job training can be overwhelming. Upon entering the workforce, these individuals must learn to absorb and digest the processes

and technology being taught by their on-the-job trainers. In an industry defined by innovation and change, the most crucial skill someone can learn is the ability to adapt. ✎

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## AS JOB GROWTH LAGS IN RURAL AMERICA, SOME COMMUNITIES SEE WIND ENERGY DEVELOPMENT AS A POSSIBLE ANSWER

*Small towns often see long-term economic benefits of local wind farms*

By Johnathan Hladik  
Center for Rural Affairs

To many in rural communities, clean energy means a clean slate. Here it's no secret that environmental considerations take a back seat to the enthusiasm surrounding new opportunities for employment. Even the potential for lower electricity rates can't bump "job creation" from the headlines.

Statistics support the sentiment. Nationally the wind industry drives a domestic manufacturing supply chain of more than 560 facilities across 43 states and supports more than 50,000 jobs. States such as Kansas boast over 4,000 good-paying positions tied to wind energy. Taxable values on personal property have increased by as much as 15 percent per year in places like Huron County, Michigan, allowing local governments to hire new workers and improve job-creating infrastructure.

But the picture isn't rosy everywhere. Though the economy has added jobs each month since March of 2010, the vast majority of this improvement has taken place in metropolitan counties. When it comes to job creation, our rural areas are being left behind.

Seven years after the early days of the Great Recession rural counties are struggling to keep pace with their urban counterparts. Right now there are 348,000 fewer jobs in rural counties than there were in 2007. There are 440,000 fewer jobs in counties with small towns today than in 2007. Meanwhile, urban counties

have gained 765,000 jobs over the same period.

If these job totals are any indication, a full 73 of Nebraska's 93 counties have yet to recover from the Great Recession. One of these is Burt County, home to the Center for Rural Affairs.

The median income for a household in Burt County is \$33,954. The average salary for a female in our county totals \$20,644. Almost 9 percent of the local population lives below the poverty line.

Burt County is also home to a proposed community wind project that has spent the past five years trying and failing to secure a power purchase agreement from the Nebraska Public Power District, the state's largest utility.

An 80 MW wind facility takes one year to build. During this time 376 new construction jobs will be added. In Nebraska, the average salary for these jobs is \$46,037, leading to total earnings of \$17.3 million. This translates to \$28.68 million in local spending into the local community economy, creating countless jobs along the way.


It's estimated that this facility will be in operation for a 20-year period. This leads to 14 additional jobs, with an average wage of \$47,143 per year. This encourages \$1.07 million in spending into the local economy. A total of \$1.84 million is made in earnings due to the direct jobs created and associated earnings, plus the indirect economic benefits from the local spending taking place.

Burt County isn't a unique ex-

ample. Hundreds of rural counties throughout the Central United States could benefit dramatically from a commitment by their local utility to invest in an energy source that keeps money in the community and the transmission infrastructure required to move this energy from where it's produced to where it's needed most.

The wind industry has grown dramatically over the past seven years. Prices have fallen by 43 percent in the past four, and continue to trend downward. Six states meet more than 15 percent of their energy needs using wind. Independent system operators such as the Southwest Power Pool have set new generation records, exceeding 30 percent. Utilities are setting new records as well, such as Xcel energy which managed to use wind for over 60 percent of its needs at this time last year.

Industry growth may be impressive, we still have a long way to go. It's important that we not rest on our laurels. Small towns throughout America are struggling to offer the kind of good paying, middle classes jobs that are needed to keep our social fabric strong. Wind energy offers a solution that capitalizes on the renewable natural resources found right in our own back yards.

An investment in wind energy is an investment in our community, and in the future of rural America. 

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## KVCC WIND TURBINE TECHNICIAN ACADEMY

*In 2008, as U.S. wind energy began its trend of exponential growth, Kalamazoo Valley Community College recognized the need for an industry-responsive education program that would rapidly produce highly trained wind workforce.*



### INTRODUCTION

According to data from the American Wind Energy Association, wind energy supplied more than 4 percent of the United States' electricity in 2013. On the state level, in 2013, wind energy had double-digit percentage shares in nine states. In Iowa and South Dakota, wind energy provided more than 25 percent of those states' electricity.

The U.S. wind industry installed 214 MW during the first quarter of this year, eclipsing total new capacity installed in the first three quarters of 2013. The U.S. now has a cumulative installed wind capacity of 61,327 MW. Currently, more than 13,000 MW of wind projects are under construction — an industry record.

Despite a significant drop in new installed capacity in 2013,

wind energy is continuing to expand its share of the U.S. energy generation mix.

### NEED AND OPPORTUNITY

In 2008, shortly before the exponential growth of the U.S. wind energy industry, installed capacity was 25,065 MW. Kalamazoo Valley Community College saw an opportunity to address the long-term need for highly qualified

wind energy technicians. Administrators and personnel recognized and understood the need for technicians who could perform services and make repairs as well as contribute to the industry's need for improved efficiencies and availability. In 2009, KVCC enrolled students and launched its Wind Turbine Technician Academy (WTTA) with the intent of changing the paradigm for educating the wind workforce.

### THE PROGRAM

Kalamazoo Valley's Wind Turbine Technician Academy attracts students who want to be the best in their field. Applications are required to assure students understand the working conditions, the complexity of the job and embrace the requirements associated with wind farm locations. Students who are accepted into the course are climb-tested, undergo background checks and take a skills assessment.

Many students are attracted to the field as a proactive opportunity to support clean energy production and by the unique opportunity to work on highly advanced technology. Students come from around the world and alumni can be found at work for nearly all of the major wind

industry employers. Workforce placement rates have remained between 95 – 97 percent for certified alumni.

This program has an elite reputation of being a responsive program driven by industry demands. That





fact is largely due to its competency-based programming which aligns to skill standards created by employers. This month, the tenth WTTA class begins its study in the 24-week course. Students attend the program Monday through Friday, eight hours a day, to gain proficiency in specific competencies and in performing actual work demonstrating their ability to apply what they learn.

Kalamazoo Valley Community College holds the recognition of earning both the American Wind Energy Association (AWEA) Seal of Approval, as well as certification by the Bildungszentrum für Erneuerbare Energien (BZEE), Renewable Energy Education Center. As a BZEE partner school, graduates have the opportunity to earn a certification as a Service Technician for Wind Turbine Engineering. Certification requires students to pass both written and practical examinations, as well as participate in in-the-field service to satisfy internship requirements.

### **HANDS-ON TRAINING**

The training lab is located in Kalamazoo, Michigan. This is a hands-on program. The first three weeks of the course is devoted to certified safety training. The program

has earned the respect of wind farm owners such as Michigan-based Crystal Flash Renewables and Heritage Sustainable Energy, who support the program through educational affiliations. These partnerships afford students the opportunity to gain hands-on experience by performing real work on real working turbines — under the guidance of their pro-

fessional instructional team. This experiential learning fulfills the certification requirements of the BZEE and produces experienced, well-tested graduates who are immediately prepared to perform the job functions required by their future employers.

“As an owner/operator of utility wind facilities, we place tremendous faith in not

only the skill, but also the dedication of the technicians,” said Rick Wilson, Vice President of Operations at Heritage Sustainable Energy, located in Traverse City, Michigan. “They are responsible for millions of dollars of equipment and assuring that it is available when the wind blows 24/7/365. The Kalamazoo Valley program instills this sense of







responsibility in the students and heightens their level of enthusiasm to execute their job with the utmost efficiency.”

### **GROWING DEMAND**

With the push in this country to generate 20 percent of our energy with wind by 2030, the demand for highly trained technicians will only increase. (Technicians starting pay ranges from \$16.50 to 24.00 per hour. Overtime is common.) The work requires technicians to be willing and able to travel at the direction of their company. The work follows service contracts that cover predicted maintenance as well as unplanned service. Industry estimates call for one wind turbine technician is needed for every ten turbines.

The need for technicians will continue to increase regardless of the market associated with policy debates and inconsistency. The existing fleet will continue to require support.

“Our training curriculum is at the leading edge of best practices in the

industry,” said Tom Sutton, Director of Wind Energy and Technical Training at Kalamazoo Valley, “We listened carefully to employers and have built a course driven by their training standards. Our reputation for excellence as a competency-based training institution is evidenced by wind energy leaders knowing our graduates personally and attributing their proficiency to the training they received while in the program. By showing it can be done, the industry has made renewed commitments to competency-based training for technicians entering the industry.”

### **STUDENT PROFILE/ TESTIMONIALS**

The Kalamazoo Valley WTTA graduated its first class of technicians in 2010. Including the class of 2014 who graduated on June 20, 134 alumni have successfully entered the field of generating renewable energy. Students come from all over the world and they go all over to find jobs. It is truly a global program.

Nick Moss, 23, a recent graduate from the Kalamazoo Valley program, already has a job lined up in Woodward, Oklahoma. A 2014 graduate of the program, Nick feels prepared to begin his career and continue advancing with it.

“My last job was a dead-end,” said Moss. “I already had a good mechanical background from working on a farm.” Working at height didn’t intimidate him, but was instead one of the things that drew him in.

“This is a fast-growing industry — I am looking forward to traveling around the country,” he said.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Kalamazoo Valley Community College Wind Turbine Technician Academy provides a fast track to high demand/high paying jobs. Wind Turbine Technicians are employed by turbine manufacturers and firms that provide operational and maintenance services as well as construction companies. Kalamazoo Valley offers this course as a non-credit full time program allowing men and women the chance to be job ready in less than six months.

“Our hands-on training capability, having trainees in real operating wind turbines, continues to make us attractive to the wind industry employers who see the field experience, combined with strong fundamentals education, as the best way to develop world class technicians,” Sutton said. The Wind Turbine Technician Academy is offered twice a year. The next academy begins on July 7, 2014. ✈

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## HIRING HELP: THE VIEW FROM A WIND ENERGY RECRUITER'S DESK

By Patricia Hovey,  
North Fork Renewables Group

*An urgent phone call ...*

"Good morning Patricia. We have an immediate need to fill a position over here! Please give this your personal attention."

"Ready? Here goes ... Must have BS in electrical Engineering, MSEE degree preferred. MBA couldn't hurt. Ten years experience as a senior manager with a utility, with all applicable skills and knowledge, i.e., MS Project, SCADA, Arc Flash, IEC Substation, medium-large generation and transmission. A skilled negotiator and public speaker, eager to sell his home and move his family 800 or 1,000 miles. Completely familiar with all federal, state and local ordinances, right? Speaks some Latvian? Couldn't hurt. There is some travel involved but never more than 30-40 percent."

"Oh, almost forgot. We won't consider anybody without, say, 7-10 years experience in wind energy."

*The conversation continues ...*

"I see our agreement mentions a fee ... What? Whoa! That's going to be a tough sell, but HR hasn't had any luck with this one. Let's give it shot. Oh, salary? Well, we expect to have a nice salary package in the neighborhood of \$75K or \$80K. Can you have us six or seven candidates this week? By the way, we're also calling four other recruiters."

Exaggerated? Yes. But only slightly!

On occasion, candidate issues can be nightmarish as well. The candidate may be secretly weighing two or more other offers or prospects or be susceptible to

counter offers by his/her present employer. The "ideal" candidate on paper may be surprisingly and devastatingly ghastly in an interview. He or she may accept a job which requires a relo and then refuse the relocation. Spouses can be fully entrenched in rewarding careers of their own and are understandably resistant to the inevitable relocation.

These examples reflect a few of the challenges to both companies and recruiters that accompany present and expected growth in wind energy.

Overall, North Fork Renewables Group, the rare recruitment firm working exclusively in renewables (primarily wind and solar), sees an extremely busy and rewarding future in wind energy recruiting, because wind, despite on-again, off-again governmental support, continues to grow dramatically.

What are key issues in attracting top wind candidates? What does it take to effectively and consistently succeed in their recruitment?

Employers who wish to attract and retain experienced qualified candidates can succeed when they make the decision to work closely with recruiters.

The hiring company needs to give the recruiter extensive background information about company and what company is trying to achieve. What is the evolving "story" of the company? Ideally the candidate will be a fit with the direction of the company as well as the job opening. Why is the position open? Was the position recently created? Why have past attempts to fill the position failed? Were the positions responsibilities not being met by a former

employee?

Why would the candidate want to work for the company? Positions are difficult to sell to a candidate if the hiring manager can't describe why the company is a great place to work. Rumors to the contrary must be dealt with. If candidates have heard terrible things about the company, those issues must be addressed. Experienced recruiters wrest from hiring authorities enough information to sell the company to the candidate.

Who is involved in the hiring? It is vital for the recruiter and candidate to know who will be conducting the interviews. The hiring process can be derailed suddenly and irreparably by a final interview with the one person who had different ideas from the start. A thorough recruitment can prevent a candidate from stepping into an elevator shaft late in the interview process.

The fact is that vast numbers of job seekers very much want to work in renewables. This is a huge plus for renewable energy industries. Experienced workers who have left wind or solar in the past are attempting to return. We regularly hear from individuals employed in oil or gas who hope to cross over to wind with full knowledge of a likely reduction in salary. It is heartwarming as well that colleges and universities increasingly offer renewable energy related degrees. Overall, the view from a wind energy recruiter's desk is encouraging. ✎



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## SIERRA CLUB ADS TARGET REPRESENTATIVES FOR JEOPARDIZING WIND JOBS BY INACTION ON PTC

*Television and online advertising spots were geo-targeted to Congressional districts that have wind energy manufacturing facilities*

The Sierra Club has launched a national ad campaign, urging Congress to reauthorize a critical incentive for domestic wind energy investments. The effort, which includes substantial online and television ad buys, focuses on members of Congress with wind manufacturing jobs in their districts and states that are at risk if the wind production tax credit is not renewed.

The first wave of ads targets twenty House members who have been silent as the wind production tax credit has expired, and involves a television ad targeting Congressman Tim Walberg (MI-07) and extensive online ad buys in 20 other districts. The ad targeting Walberg will aired more than 5,000 times throughout June on broadcast and cable channels in Michigan's 7th district. Geo-targeted online ads calling out 20 other Representatives launched this week and will run at least through June on local and national news sites. These members represent districts and states with a growing wind industry who have not taken a position in support of extending the federal production tax credit for renewable energy. In most cases, they have taken no position at all.

The wind production tax credit expired at the end of last year, in part because of new opposition from groups reportedly linked to fossil fuel interests.

"The Wind Production Tax credit is arguably one of the



best bets we've made on clean, domestic energy," said Dave Hamilton, Director of Clean Energy for Sierra Club's Beyond Coal campaign. "It encourages huge investments, creates good American jobs, helps our country become more energy independent, and cuts air and water pollution. But many in Congress are failing to act, leaving thousands of American workers and communities across the country blowing in the wind."

The wind industry employs more than 80,000 American workers and produces enough clean energy to power 15 million homes. It saves more than 30 billion gallons of fresh water each year compared with other energy sources. According to the American Wind Energy Association, if growth remains steady, the industry will produce 20 percent of America's electricity by 2030.

"For wind in America's heartland, the sky's the limit,"

explained Mary Anne Hitt, Director of Sierra Club's Beyond Coal campaign. "Wind energy has created tens of thousands of good-paying, family-sustaining jobs, and has the potential to create tens of thousands more — all while generating enough clean energy to more than meet our nation's electricity needs."

In April, the Senate Finance Committee approved a package of extenders that included the wind tax credit. Movement has since stalled in the Senate, and The House Ways and Means Committee failed to include an extension of the wind tax credit in a similar package in May.

Forthcoming online, television, and print ads are planned as the Sierra Club continues to pressure members of Congress to act to protect clean energy jobs in their own communities.

— Source: The Sierra Club



# CLEAN ENERGY SECTOR ADDS 5,600 JOBS IN THE FIRST QUARTER

## *Idaho, Texas, and California among states with highest 1Q job tallies*

Congressional inaction on key clean energy tax policies, coupled with attacks on state renewable energy programs, led to a dramatic decline in clean energy job announcements in the first quarter of this year, according to the latest report from the nonpartisan business group Environmental Entrepreneurs (E2).

About 5,600 clean energy and clean transportation jobs were announced in the first three months of this year, down from 12,000 such jobs reported in the comparable period in 2013.

A major geothermal project in Idaho accounted for the most clean energy jobs announced on the state level in the first quarter. Idaho was followed by more traditional clean energy leaders. The remaining states in the Top 10 were: Texas, California, Missouri, New York, Kansas, Arizona, Hawaii, New Mexico and Louisiana.. For the complete report and state-by-state details on all clean energy jobs announced in Q1 and in previous quarters, see here.

Despite adding thousands of new jobs to the economy, the dramatic drop in clean energy

and clean transportation job announcements in the quarter is a clear reflection of mixed signals American businesses are getting from Capitol Hill and state capitals when it comes to policies such as the federal Production Tax Credit (PTC) and various state-level renewable energy standards (RES), according to E2.

“Congress pulled the plug on smart clean energy tax policies at the end of last year, while in the states, lawmakers are getting bullied by special interests that don’t want our country to produce more clean, renewable energy,” said E2 executive director Bob Keefe. “Guess who’s suffering as a result? American workers and businesses.”

Keefe added: “Given the muddled policy environment on clean energy, low overall jobs numbers were expected. Fortunately, it’s not too late for lawmakers to steer clean energy and clean transportation job growth back on track.

“If we want to keep creating good-paying clean energy jobs in America, our elected officials need to do their jobs first. They need to support these smart policies that will help our

economy while also helping our environment,” Keefe said.

Among the notable clean energy projects announced in the first three months of 2014:

- Aguacaliente’s 25 MW, \$150 million geothermal plant is expected to bring 800 jobs to Walker Ranch, Idaho;
- NJR Clean Energy Ventures’ wind farm in Carroll County, Iowa, could create more than 80 jobs; and
- The 22 MW Barilla solar project in Pecos County, Texas, is expected to create about 350 jobs.

Among industry sectors in the first quarter, there was a noticeable shift in the types of jobs announced in the solar industry in particular. Whereas larger, utility-scale projects were drivers of job growth in previous quarters, the most recent report shows residential solar is gaining ground and putting people to work. Other major sectors like building efficiency and wind also saw declines.

— Source: E2

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## NEW EPA STANDARDS WILL RESULT IN MORE JOBS, LESS CARBON

New Environmental Protection Agency standards that for the first time will cut carbon pollution from power plants are an economic catalyst that will drive innovation and investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency and will trigger economic growth throughout

the United States, according to the nonpartisan business group Environmental Entrepreneurs (E2).

By sending a clear market signal to businesses that America is on the path to a clean energy future, these common-sense standards will create hundreds

of thousands of good, high-paying jobs that will help make our nation’s workforce more competitive.

“Here’s what these standards mean for America: More jobs, less carbon pollution,” said E2 executive director Bob Keefe.

— Source: E2

## Rob O'Brian

President

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**What can you tell our readers about the Joplin region? How would you describe its climate/suitability for the wind energy industry?**

There are three words we use that are best representative of the Joplin region: Central, Connected, and Capable.

Central: The Joplin region's strong central U.S. location is right in the heart of growing wind energy markets.

Connected: Efficient, cost-effective highway and rail transportation routes provide easy connection to major wind project areas. Eight OEM turbine manufacturers are located within 600 miles of Joplin.

Capable: The Joplin region is home to a large, hard-working labor force has the capabilities to meet the highest level of customer demands.

**Could you talk briefly about the level of wind energy industry involvement already present or planned for the Joplin region?**

Existing Joplin region companies are already engaged in the wind industry and offer unique supply chain opportunities in fiberglass nacelles and hubs, turbine gearbox bearings, fabricated metal structures and components, electronics and cabling, energy storage systems and oversize, overweight transportation.

**How would you describe the general opinion toward renewable energy — wind specifically — in the Joplin region?**

Industries and individuals alike are embracing alternative energy sources and look for continual improvement in cost, storage options and ease of attainment.

**Could you mention some of the educational opportunities that may exist as they relate to wind energy and other related industries?**

The rest of the workforce in the Joplin region is enhanced with training facilities focused on technology.

These facilities include: The Kansas Technology Center at Pittsburg State University, the Missouri Alternative and Renewable Energy Technology Center at Crowder College, the Missouri Advanced Power Systems Research at Missouri Southern State University. ✍

## JOPLIN REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP

The seven-county Joplin region is located near the geographic and population centers of the United States. The City of Joplin is the hub of a Metropolitan Statistical Area of 179,000 people and a regional market area of nearly 500,000. The area's market reach, productive workforce and high quality of living make the Joplin Region an ideal location for manufacturing, warehousing, & distribution.

## WORKFORCE

The JRP region has workforce of more than 200,000. Based on a recent labor market survey by the Docking Institute, the available workforce pool is nearly 94,000 people. Of this available workforce, more than 50% have some level of college or technical school education and 94% are high-school graduates.

Wages in the region are very competitive. Wages are approximately 80-85% of U.S. averages, depending on employment sector. Area employers give high-ratings to the productivity and loyalty of their workforce. While it is not unusual for companies to draw employees from as far as 60 minutes away, the average commute time is only 17 minutes, reflecting the efficient highway system and overall lack of traffic congestion in the region.