

Mann named 'Hi-Tec' educator of the year

A local educator and trailblazer with some serious qualifications has been tapped for a national award.

Mike Mann, an instructor at Central Alabama Community College, is set to receive the Educator of the Year Award later this month at the High Impact Technology Exchange Conference in Orlando.

“Considering the people in the room (at the conference) – I feel everyone in HI-TEC is deserving,” Mann said. “These are the best technical instructors in the country. When you look at those numbers, I am honored to have even been on the list.”

Each year the award honors a community college teacher for distinguished contributions at the local and national level in Advanced Technological Education (ATE), which is a division of the National Science Foundation that teaches students how to assemble equipment for automotive manufacturers involving the modification and calibration of assembly line robots. The NSF funds around 40 ATE programs in the United States.

Mann, who, after graduating from CACC, earned a bachelor's and master's degree from Georgia Institute of Technology, is technical division chair and an industry training specialist at CACC. He has over 20 years of workforce-related and industrial experience. At the Russell Corporation, Mann began as an entry-level engineer in the Research and Development department before leaving as an engineering manager to pursue teaching. Before leaving the apparel manufacturer, he did some post-graduate studies at Perdue and Michigan universities. Mann maintains relations with numerous universities and technology centers, including the Oakridge National Laboratories.

The fields of study where Mann has vast knowledge range from the scientific and educational to industrial and management; the areas include occupational health and safety, hydraulics and pneumatics.

“I'm providing education of technology in the automotive industry,” he said. “We have classes in robotics and programmable logic controllers, or PLCs, which are industry-hardened computers that control machines like the ones on an assembly line. These are robust computers that run 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

“It's a good environment for the technical education of students. The president, Dr. Steve Franks, is very supportive of manufacturing business needs, which supports my efforts in advanced technological education through the National Science Foundation.”

Mann runs the annual Consortium for Alabama Regional Center for Automotive Manufacturing, or CARCAM, sponsored Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

(STEM) camps at CACC. These camps are for rising high school juniors and seniors. The two one-week camps, which this year hosted over 50 students from nine local high schools, expose the kids to existing classes and tours of factories to see the process and application of the areas they plan to study. At the camps, they also get to build kit robots.

CARCAM is an intercollegiate group with ties to the state that started with five schools, but has since expanded to nine colleges. The agency seeks to spread the knowledge of mechatronics, which is the synthesis of mechanics, electronics and computers with engineering.

“There are some really good jobs in the automotive industry,” Mann said. “I’ve got students in local factories. I’ve got a number of people who have come back to update their skills. We’ve got a co-op program; a lot of our manufacturers allow the students to work part time. They get to see their education put into practice, they get to see the practical side to what they are learning.”

As a manager at the Russell Corporation, Mann had to send employees out of state to receive continuing education classes, so he is glad to be a part of such a great opportunity at the local level.

“It’s a great opportunity for kids in the state,” he said. “Registration is currently going on for the fall semester. It looks like we’ll have record numbers.

“I want to emphasize the opportunity available for locals going through the program. We have some graduates that have been very successful.”

Mann and his wife, Vicki, met when they taught at a math help lab at CACC. They have two children: Mallorie, 20, and Michael, 14.

Mann also holds two patents – one in pattern recognition and another in material handling.