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Leadership for the future

Where will the new railroad industry leaders come from? Who will take over the top slots as the railroad industry deals with the changes and challenges of the 21st Century? And who will train them?

I saw some answers to those questions recently. First, Michigan State University's Certificate Course in Railway Management graduated its first class on June 20. Representing several Class 1 and 2 railroads, as well as a major railroad supplier, 17 participants spent more than 160 classroom hours and 40 hours of independent study to achieve the course goals.



George S. Sokulski
Associate Publisher

The course was led by Robert Gallamore, Ph.D., and Steven Ditmeyer, two names familiar to most of us in this industry. Executives from railroads, financial analysts from both Wall Street and Chicago and leading authorities on railroad operations and principles of international operations provided information on special topics in the classroom.

The Railway Management Program has been funded in large part by gifts from Dennis Gilstad, president, founder and chairman of FCM Rail, Ltd., and Edward A. Burkhardt, founder, president and CEO of Rail World, Inc., and Rail World Holdings LLC. Both presented units to the group during the course.

Gilstad told the graduates: "Help create an international social/business network through raileducation.com. Keep in touch with Michigan State University and your colleagues and future colleagues for an optimization of this and future investments in 'your' rail education."

Burkhardt emphasized that this course is "just what the rail industry needs, a straight-forward management course for the future leaders of the industry."

The graduation speaker, Robert C. VanderClute, senior vice president - safety and operations, Association of American Railroads, spoke about the challenges facing railroads in the next several years. He shared with the participants the need to "think outside the box to solve the problems that need to be confronted in the years ahead."

While some U.S. universities offer degrees in railroad engineering or courses relating to specific areas of railroad operations, MSU has the only comprehensive educational program for railway executives, according to program and industry officials.

Gilstad said the goal is eventually to broaden MSU's program and offer master's and possibly bachelor's degrees.

I think this program is what this industry needs to prepare its leaders for the challenges of the next decades. but I have one question:

Where were the rest of you? This program should be drawing people from virtually every railroad, large or small. Any money invested in tuition will pay big dividends to those who are wise enough to send their future leaders to this course.

FCM sent two of its own employees to take this course. What about the rest of the supply community? If you want your people to really understand their customers, this course is the place to send them.

On another front, to foster the growth of rail engineering education within universities, the AREMA Educational Foundation and AREMA Committee 24 - Education and Training, organized the Railway Engineering Education Symposium to provide engineering professors with rail curriculum to take back to the classroom.

REES drew 30 professors and 55 people total June 8-11 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The symposium included two days of discussion on railroad engineering materials, current and future research and a visit to a local railroad facility. The classroom portion of the symposium involved presentation and discussion of the lecture materials that was also provided to the professors.

Time was also set aside for presentation and discussion of railroad research activities and opportunities and the current state of railroad engineering education. The field visit provided professors the chance to see the railroad environment first hand.

Both these premier events give me hope for the future of our industry.



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