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CSI's partnership with Micron grows Twin Falls-based college continues to train high-tech workers in Boise

By Patti Murphy
Times-News correspondent

BOISE -- A relationship between the College of Southern Idaho and a Boise-based high-tech firm continues to grow into its seventh year, drawing praise as a model for future collaborative efforts between higher education and private industry.

Since 1998, CSI has partnered with Boise-based Micron Technologies Inc. to provide worksite education to employees of the high-tech company, giving them the training they need to operate and maintain the complicated technical equipment used to produce a global supply of technology.

Karen Vauk, Micron's director of organizational and work force development, said the joint-partnership provides opportunity to employees who want to excel and move up in the company. Micron pays 100 percent of its employees industry-related course work

"The traditional educational model makes it difficult for full-time workers to get their degree," Vauk said. "The CSI courses accommodate our shifts."

The unusual partnership between an institution of higher education and a high-tech corporation 130 miles away came about during a state-level roundtable discussion of Idaho's educational system. Among the topics discussed was how to address the need for greater accessibility to technical training.

"Karen (Vauk) told us Micron needed classes to be delivered in a different way than in the higher-education setting," said Jerry Beck, CSI's interim president.

"Micron wanted to prepare entry level positions for upper-level jobs and it was our job to help create a talented work force," he said.

This led to an aggressive plan for CSI to have someone hired and providing classes at Micron within three months, which is exactly what happened, both Vauk and Beck said.

The success of the CSI-Micron training program can be measured in its enrollment, which has grown to 340 students from the 47 students that participated during the

first year of operation. The classes, which can accommodate 20 to 25 students, are always full, and that accessibility to the program is a key issue for students.

Currently there are two full-time and seven part-time CSI instructors at Micron teaching a combination of hands-on and computer-based training in electronics technology and math.

Vauk said the typical student in the CSI program is in an operator, which is a front-line production employee who is in a position that does not require a college degree.

However, many operators want to advance within the company and need to have a degree to do so. Vauk said the CSI program offers the necessary courses for a two-year associate's degree, enabling employees to move into the higher-level technician positions, where they're responsible for the maintenance of Micron's multi-million dollar memory wafer manufacturing equipment. This is the equipment that creates memory chips and other technology that drives cell phones, vehicle air-bag deployment systems, and even the slow-motion camera imaging made famous by the Keanu Reeves film "The Matrix."

"Our expenditure on this equipment is between \$1 billion and \$1.5 billion annually, and the people who work on it are highly trained," Vauk noted.

Beck said the partnership benefits the state as a whole.

"From our standpoint, we have a great relationship with Micron," he said. "They are significant as a provider of one of our state's most valuable resources."

Micron also has a partnership with Boise State University to provide upper-level education to its employees.

Vauk said that the concept of building partnerships between higher education and the corporate community is considered unusual in other parts of the world, but the idea that Micron and CSI have developed is catching on.

"Both our Italy and Japan facilities have begun using our local CSI and BSU partnership as a model," she said.

From this perspective, one could say that Twin Falls is having a notable impact on the global technology industry.

"It's been said that the technology industry is the farms of the future," said Trudy Sullivan, Micron's director of strategic communications. "The backbone of this future is the continued investment in research and development, and education is what is supporting that movement."

About Micron Technologies Inc.

* History: Micron Technology Inc. was founded and incorporated in October 1978. It is overseen by Steven R. Appleton, the CEO, president and chairman of the board. Appleton joined Micron in 1983 and was appointed to his current position in 1994.

* Products: Micron offers DRAM, flash memory, CMOS image sensors, other semiconductor components and memory modules. DRAM is one of the largest consumption categories in the semiconductor market. Micron ranked third in worldwide market share for DRAM revenues in the second quarter of 2004.

* Locations and operations: Micron has operations in 18 countries, including wafer fabrication facilities in Boise, Virginia, Italy and Japan; joint venture interest in fabrication operations at TECH Semiconductor in Singapore; assembly and test operations in Boise and Singapore; and memory-module assembly operations in Boise, Singapore, Scotland and Puerto Rico. In addition, Micron has a manufacturing facility in Lehi, Utah.

* Employees: As of September 2004, Micron had approximately 17,900 employees worldwide

* For more information: www.micron.com.