

The building project will consolidate Tri Star's CTE program into one comprehensive central campus for the first time.

# CASE STUDY: HOW A BUILDING PROJECT CAN ENHANCE YOUR CTE PROGRAM

By Tim Buschur & Brad Bubp

**THE DECISION TO TAKE ON A BUILDING PROJECT IS EXCITING FOR ANY CAREER AND TECHNICAL education (CTE) program, but high ceilings and shiny floors shouldn't be the focus of your efforts. When you think about your program and its place within the community, this opportunity can be leveraged to build much more than new facilities.**

## Determining Your "Why"

Tri Star Career Compact, which supports CTE programs for nine schools in north-west Ohio, recently embarked on a building project to create a new central campus that would consolidate its programs into one location for the first time; the Compact has always operated in the leftover spaces of three separate school districts.

Historically, like many institutions of its kind, Tri Star Career Compact has been perceived negatively in the community. Local districts even sued to keep the school from opening. The program was seen as a last resort for students until a recent focus on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) and CTE at the state and national levels began

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to boost its image. Today the program boasts a 99.5 percent graduation rate with more than 60 percent of its students going on to postsecondary education and training (“Career-technical planning,” 2017). For Tri Star, their building project was about more than new facilities. It was about taking their newfound success to the next level.

The first step to approaching a building project is to ask why you are building at all. What does your program wish to accomplish? Tri Star’s vision was to create something they’ve never had — their own unique identity as a high-tech, vibrant school of choice that serves a vital role in its local economy. Instead of simply building a new campus, Tri Star’s leadership viewed the project as a way to build a brand and valuable partnerships within their community. Approaching any kind of developmental enrichment project from this angle will help you to think bigger and to see your endeavor for what it really is

— the ultimate opportunity to strengthen and promote your program.

### Designing for Maximum Impact

A building project can present a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and will influence your students for generations. Therefore, it is critical that you plan and design your facilities to be flexible and future-ready to best serve your students now and for years to come.

Tri Star teamed with Fanning Howey, a local architecture and engineering firm with national expertise, for the design of their new campus. Deemed Tri Star 2.0, the team set big goals for developing its new identity. From the beginning, it was said that if Tri Star 2.0 looked like a normal school, everyone was getting fired. Leadership envisioned a facility that looked more like a corporate headquarters than a school, a facility where students would walk in and say, “Wow.” For inspiration, the team toured the Honda Heritage Center

in Marysville, Ohio, as well as several local CTE schools. It was clear their building needed something special to attract new students, and to establish a sense of pride among current students.

The resulting design features a dramatic exterior façade and a university-like interior atmosphere. High bay spaces are positioned at the front of the building to provide visibility to the surrounding community. High-tech robotics, electronics, computer science and machining programs are put on display here with views in from State Route 703, a major traffic thoroughfare, made even more visually appealing through the use of curtainwall and storefront glazing. Once inside, all labs have full glass doors, sidelights, transoms and large windows. This highly transparent interior serves to get students interested in, and excited about the activities and programs offered.

The central common space design of Tri Star 2.0 is especially significant. Created

as a collaboration space for students, it also doubles as a meeting place for local businesses, capable of seating up to 500 guests. A portable platform and video wall made up of nine 70-inch high-definition flat screens makes for a Ted Talk-like presentation space — where, if you wait long enough, you might expect to see Elon Musk. There is nothing like it in the area, and with thanks to collaborative and conference-like seating, it will be able to support any kind of training or event needed.

Overall, the design of Tri Star 2.0 supports a variety of learning- and community-centered activities. It creates a transparent, flexible, multi-disciplined environment that brings all programs together into one campus, in order to enhance collaboration. Tri Star 2.0 will place a particular emphasis on programs with student-directed learning by implementing computer-on-wheels stations and integrated mobile technologies such as iPads for video instruction when needed. For the first time students will be put in the driver's seat of their education to proceed in the way that they learn best.

### Integrating Partnerships with Businesses and Local Universities

Career and technical education programs exist to prepare students for the workplace, future training or higher education; and so, too, can mutually beneficial partnerships with local businesses and universities provide valuable opportunities for students.

Local business leaders have been involved from the inception of Tri Star 2.0, even in the selection of an architect. These leaders were eager to play a role in the development of a campus that would educate their future employees, and they provided the Tri Star team with valuable insights and contributions. The new campus will operate from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. each day, with an intention to host certification and training programs after work hours in collaboration with local businesses and community groups, as well as to encourage community involvement through a partnership with the local YMCA.

Hoping to change its tenuous relationship with local universities, the location of the new campus was chosen strategically

to strengthen synergy with Wright State University (WSU): The new building site is located across the road from WSU's Lake Campus, with only 700 feet separating the two. Tri Star has found a new partner in Wright State, as the campuses will share resources that benefit students from both schools. Wright State Lake Campus is planning to build a manufacturing center, but given its proximity their students will be able to take advantage of Tri Star's new manufacturing facilities in the meantime. This has allowed Wright State to direct the focus of their own new building to advanced machinery and processes, and to avoid duplicating equipment that is available at Tri Star. Because Tri Star and Wright State students will be able to use both facilities, the partnership offers them opportunities that neither institution could have offered on their own, thus increasing educational opportunities and saving money.

### Launching a Community into a New Era of Opportunities

The execution of a building project sometimes requires fundraising to move forward with capital or resources. This prospect can seem worrisome but it's yet another opportunity in disguise when you can embrace promotional tools as a method to get your message out, and make the most of your efforts.

In 2015, after the state of Ohio passed legislation that allowed Tri Star to fund their new building as a pilot program, the administration worked with local elected officials to gain access to property tax funds to pay for the project; until then, schools lacked the ability to bond through property taxes. Tri Star leaders were the face of the levy. They held press conferences with six county commissioners to discuss the impact of the project, and all economic development directors were in support. Signs were made. Postcards were sent to Tri Star alumnus in the area, and letters to the editor sent from local graduates and parents. Leadership asked (and gained) the approval of every town council, spoke at neighborhood block parties, and even created a moving banner to promote the project. The team collaborated with local school districts to coordinate the timing of the building levy, and as a re-

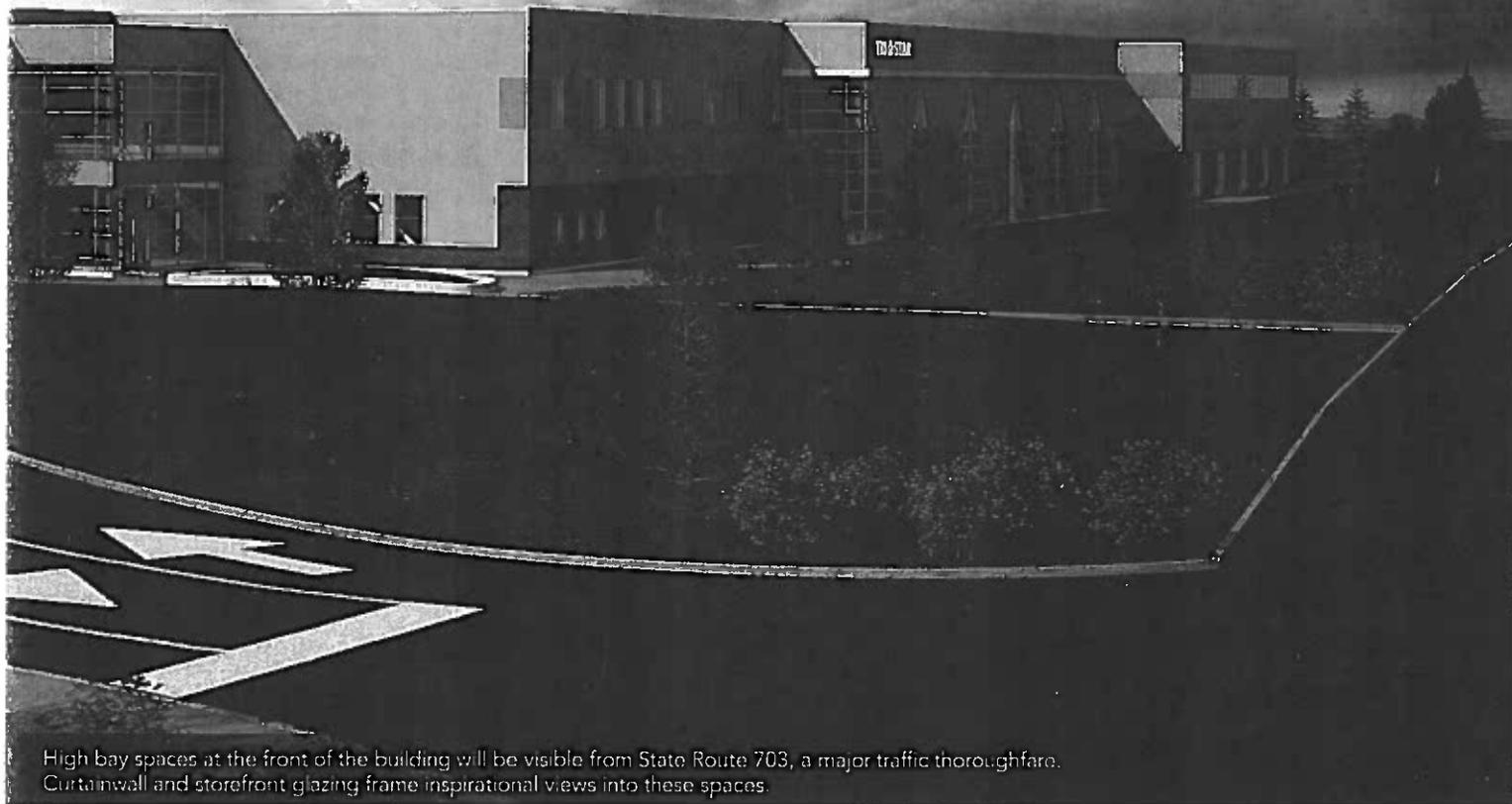


sult, several districts even held back their own levies to allow Tri Star to be the only item on the special election ballot. After a tremendous team effort, the levy passed in all nine school districts with one of the largest turnouts ever for a special election and for a state facilities project in the area.

Campaigning is a lot of work, but it may be necessary to move your project forward. Whether you're campaigning for funding or simply to spread awareness, this represents an opportunity for you to promote the value of your CTE program.

When addressing your community about the benefits of a building project, perhaps the most compelling message is its effect on the local economy. Explain that capital improvement projects can work to expand your CTE program by attracting new students and providing them with better education and training. This, in turn, creates a more skilled workforce that will not only attract new businesses to your area, but will also help to strengthen local companies and grow your economy.

From 2011 to 2016 Auglaize and Mercer counties both saw civilian labor force increases while their neighbors to the north and south decreased ("Civilian labor," 2017). Tri Star counties also currently



High bay spaces at the front of the building will be visible from State Route 703, a major traffic thoroughfare. Curtainwall and storefront glazing frame inspirational views into these spaces.

have lower unemployment than their neighbors, with Mercer County having the lowest unemployment rate in the state ("Civilian labor," 2017). The area is rich with agricultural, manufacturing and healthcare jobs, and Tri Star Career Compact equips students with the education and training that they need to be successful in these fields. Much of their recent success is due to the team undertaking extensive promotional activities to explain how better CTE opportunities in a new, modern building facility will result in a brighter future for the entire region by growing the economy and keeping local companies strong.

### Final Thoughts

Thirty-four years after Tri Star's founding, their new building project validates everything the program has been working toward. Since the 2.0 project was announced, Tri Star has received numerous comments from people saying they want their child to take classes at the new campus — some from parents of children as young as second grade. Nearly 300 people attended the groundbreaking at their new site (so many that the sheriff's department had to be called to direct traffic). But the best part of all is that Tri Star students now have an

identity of their own. They will look around at their new facilities and be proud of the education they receive, the partnerships they build, and the value they bring to their local economy.

Whether you'd like to improve your perception in your community, expand your offerings, increase enrollment or bolster your local economy, a lot can be learned from Tri Star's success. First, it is imperative that you tie your project into local job needs and get key companies on board. Supporting and improving local jobs will help strengthen your economy, and local business leaders will be your advocates. Second, consider the students and teachers you are trying to attract and offer them something unique. Does your community have a large, sleek presentation space? Do students have access to all of the technology training they need to compete in the 21st century world economy? Offering spaces, tech or training that can't be found anywhere else in the area will help you become the first choice for students and teachers. Finally, plan and design for flexibility. With the steady advancement of technology, you don't really know what programs will need to be housed in your spaces in five years. Flexible design offers

your program limitless potential when looking to the future. ■

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