

SCSU and Electrolux partner to enhance worker skills

Saturday, November 8, 2003

ST. CLOUD, Minn. -- More than 650 Electrolux employees in St. Cloud will receive training to improve the company's manufacturing processes through a Minnesota Job Skills Partnership grant awarded to the Department of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering at St. Cloud State University. The \$100,000 grant was announced today during a special ceremony held on the university campus.

Employees at all levels will participate in classroom training activities, and then—in teams that include SCSU faculty and graduate students—apply what they've learned to their work in the Electrolux plant.

"This partnership benefits both Electrolux and SCSU. Graduate students from the SCSU engineering management program are able to apply what they've learned in the classroom by working on real processes and solving real problems," said Ben Baliga, project director and associate professor.

"Electrolux will also have a better-trained and motivated workforce that will help the plant produce quality products at the lowest cost. A thriving and growing Electrolux will add to the vitality of the Central Minnesota region."

Electrolux is a multi-national company with worldwide plants and is the world's largest producer of powered appliances for kitchen, cleaning, and outdoor use. The St. Cloud plant, which employs more than 1,600 people and produces refrigerators and chest freezers, must continuously find ways to remain competitive and counter the cost advantages of manufacturers that have plants in countries with lower wages. As part of the training project, Electrolux engineers will learn to rely more on scientific methods to determine the best parameters for manufacturing processes. In addition, line workers will learn to run machines using the new parameters as well as to collect and interpret data so that processes can be adjusted when necessary.

Other elements of the project include using robotics and automation to reduce worker fatigue and injuries, developing a better plant layout that will accommodate recent company growth, enhancing managerial skills, and designing a safer work environment.

Most of the instruction will be provided by faculty at SCSU, but two partnering educational institutions will help with some components. Ridgewater College will conduct robotic welding training and design workplace signs to improve employee safety. St. Cloud Technical College will provide diversity training for workers and leadership training for supervisory staff.

"Most of this project is engineering or technical in nature. But in order to maximize the benefits, Electrolux employees will participate in diversity and leadership training to help create more cohesive teams," said Baliga.

The Minnesota Job Skills Partnership, which is within the Minnesota

Department of Employment and Economic Development's Workforce Development Division, brings businesses with specific education needs together with educational institutions to design training programs to meet those needs.

SCSU undergraduate and graduate degrees balance strong liberal arts programs and foundations with specialized career preparation. The university offers approximately 15,500 students more than 175 majors, minors and pre-professional programs in Business, Education, Fine Arts & Humanities, Science & Engineering, and Social Sciences, and 50 master's degrees through its School of Graduate Studies.