



Taking a nontraditional path helps a student stay grounded

Nicole Horan is in perpetual motion. She's also *into* perpetual motion, having been one of many who've tried (so far unsuccessfully) to create a machine that will run forever under its own power.

The student chased that elusive goal for her senior project at Warwick (R.I.) Area Career and Technical Center, using a generator that runs with magnets. She "captivated the judges with her knowledge of the subject and presentation," says electrical instructor Stephen Brady.

Horan applied the same kind of drive to her SkillsUSA state competition in Industrial Motor Control. She won it for three consecutive years and went on to the nationals in Kansas City, Mo.

"I've learned that the first year you go out there is definitely overwhelming," she says. Horan advises competitors to "stay calm, try not to get anxious, and if you happen to make a mistake, stay relaxed. You can still fix it. Everybody loses points somewhere."

While the only female competing in her electrical class, Horan realized there are more women in the construction industry than she first thought. The experience also helped her focus on what she did best: troubleshooting circuits.

Residential wiring "is more physical and muscle-bound," Horan explains, but "when working with motors and controls, your brain is your strongest muscle. [It requires] being creative, patient and intelligent."

Now, at the New England Institute of Technology, Horan will pursue a degree in electrical technology and, later, electrical engineering. She wants to become a teacher after working in industry for a few years.

"Lessons learned at the career center helped me become a better academic student," she says. "The dynamics used in electricity transcended my academic subjects. Math and science had meaning and relation to the real world." ●

— By E. Thomas Hall

Photos: Lloyd Wolf



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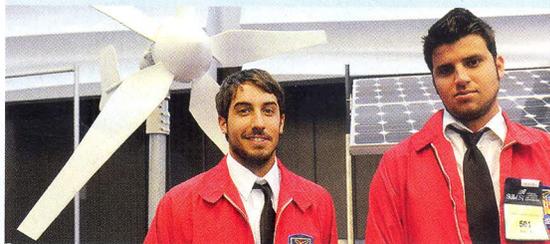
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