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# Detroit Free Press

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FRIDAY

SEPT. 1, 2006 METRO FINAL



## MICHIGAN BUSINESS

### Lawrence Tech has help for businesses Universities offer coaching, train

BY LORI HIGGINS FREE PRESS EDUCATION WRITER

Managers at **Walltek Design Build Inc.** needed help.

It took just a three-day course designed by Lawrence Technological University for them to realize it.

"It was an expense, and sometimes you spend money to find out what you don't have. For us, it was a good investment," said Todd Garris, president of Walltek, a company based in Clarkston and with offices in Massachusetts, Florida and Pennsylvania. The course was part of a new Professional Development Center at Southfield-based Lawrence Tech that is providing coaching, training and assistance to local businesses and entrepreneurs.

"To make people prepared for today, tomorrow and the next day, a new approach is required sometimes, and that's the vision the university has," said Tim Meloche, program manager at the center.

Universities increasingly look for ways to share their expertise outside their campuses.

"A lot of universities are finding they need to do this more. They're becoming aggressive in realizing they need to reach out," said Garris, whose company builds retaining wall systems.

Jeff Mason, senior vice president for technology development with the Lansing-based **Michigan Economic Development Corp.**, said it's crucial that universities "have kind of recognized and taken it upon themselves to work with the business community, to help stimulate and accelerate the pace of growth in our economy in the state." Whether universities are working with young companies or established ones, "this is how we will create the next generation of entrepreneurs and business owners here in the state of Michigan," Mason said.

At Lawrence Tech, the Professional Development Center helps businesses solve problems and do a better job of retaining customers. It works with individuals on small business ownership and entrepreneurship.

"You don't wake up and become a great businessperson," Meloche said. That's where training and coaching come in. "To stand out, you have to be able to think a little different, be creative, be inventive, take a chance. But you have to do it with research, with some understanding of where you're going," Meloche said.

Costs for the center's programs vary depending on the needs of individuals or businesses, Meloche said. In October, for instance, an all-day insurance industry event will cost \$49 per person. Costs can rise up to several hundred dollars a day for services based on such things as the cost of bringing in speakers.

Garris went to Lawrence Tech earlier this year when he saw a need to offer training for employees who were interested in becoming project managers. Those employees, as well as workers in other areas of the company, were brought to Oakland County from Walltek's four offices. Garris said the course cost about \$3,500.

"We have a lot of diamonds in the rough here, a lot of good people that lack a formal education," Garris said. The idea was to teach them the responsibilities of being a project manager and the language they would need to understand when speaking with customers. But the training taught Garris that, while those employees were effective at their jobs in the field, they weren't quite suited yet for the management jobs. And the employees, Garris said, realized the same.

"LTU educated us on what a project manager needs to be doing. Once we learned that, it was great. We could evaluate our existing people and say, 'Do we have it? Do we need it?' We discovered we needed it."

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