

## **John Royster's TAT success story**

Our next story from Training and Technology history comes from John Royster, who writes:

"I really enjoyed your story on Mayme Crowell. It brought back a lot of memories for me. There were some truly remarkable people on staff at the TAT program.

"I was a 1973/74 TAT graduate. I feel, and I always have, that TAT guided me down a path that probably saved my life. I was 16 years old at the time. My father had passed away when I was 12. I was pretty wild.

"My mother had just about lost control of me. She did the best she could. She was a good role model, and still is. I just didn't notice it at the time. I was hanging out with the wrong crowd, skipping school, staying out all night partying...just asking for trouble. My grades were barely passing. No future plans whatsoever.

"Looking back now, the friends I had then, I can only think of a very few of them that didn't spend time in jail later in their lives. Some even spent time in the penitentiary. Most of them are now deceased. All died at a very early age. I was most likely headed that way myself. Who knows?

"One day at Oak Ridge High School (ORHS) the football coach stopped me in the hall. At first I thought I was in trouble—because I usually was. He asked me if I would like to join a group of students that were going to attend a six-month vocational school at the Y-12 Plant called 'Training and Technology.' At first I didn't think I would like it. He explained to me, I would spend eight hours a day at the facility, and I wouldn't have to come back to school. I was just months away from graduating and needed only a few more credits. I thought, 'No more school? I'M IN.'

"ORHS teachers came to the plant twice a week to help me finish my English and History classes. I would get to graduate and receive my diploma with my fellow high school students at the end of the school year, I was told.

"After an orientation exam, it was decided I would be in the Machining class. We were told if we missed three days or were late three times during the program, we were out. I tried to put my best foot forward.

"As it turned out, I liked it. I had different machining projects to work on. We operated milling machines, lathes, band saws, etc. We also had blueprint reading classes, and all different types of math we had to learn. One day it just clicked. I loved doing the math. I was pretty good at it. I thought: 'this is all right.'

"The instructors were great!! And they were all very patient. It was the first time I could remember doing something I thought was important. I started having more and more self-esteem.

"I used a lot of aluminum and steel on the machining projects. Holding some of the blueprint tolerances was tough. The instructors would inspect the machined parts. I mostly 'killed' the parts in the earlier stages of the machining projects. The instructor would just go over to the scrap pile and throw in my assigned project and say, 'start over.' I finally completed, and passed all of the projects.

"I remember a few of the guys never did finish them. They were inner city teens from Chicago and Atlanta. The projects were pretty difficult. The instructor(s) were kind of strict. Looking back, that's probably what I needed at that time. It taught one that life will not be easy. One has to put forth an effort. Most of the kids in the program did.

"After graduation, and receiving my high school diploma and my Machining Apprenticeship in the same year, I went to work for a company in North Carolina as a Machinist...making a whopping \$3.50 per hour. I thought I was rich. I earned some shop experience, and after a year, I decided to relocate back to Tennessee.

"I was lucky enough to get hired with a company in Clinton as a Precision Grinder. I started attending Knox Area Vocational School at night in the Machining program. Four years later, I was hired at Y-12 as a Machinist. I worked 23 years with the ATLC labor union. I then got the opportunity to be setup to a Machinist Supervisor in 2002. After 4 years of doing that, I have since moved into a production support position. Last week I celebrated my 31st year at Y-12.

"By no means have I been perfect through the years. I'm a long way from that. Life has had its struggles. But I can just only wonder how my life would have turned out without me having attended this great program.

"I have been blessed with two great kids (now young adults) that are both college graduates and have very successful careers of their own.

"Anyway, this is my small success story. And I feel I owe the TAT program for it. It was a great opportunity a long time ago for a troubled kid. It truly did turn my life around. I will be forever grateful."

—*John Royster*

I am sure you realize that John's experience at TAT is typical of many others as well. The training program came along at a time in their lives when they were in need of structure, purpose and a resulting sense of accomplishment from achieving goals. Much the same could be said today...many young people benefit from training programs modeled after TAT and similar effective programs of the past.