



AHR Expo nurtures workforce development with student experience at Vegas show

WESTPORT, Conn., April 29, 2022 – The 2022 AHR Expo traveled to Vegas with a strong return to in-person events, a critical need in the industry as HVACR continues to be on the front lines of many major world challenges. Discussions across the industry include energy efficiency, environmental changes, air quality, and a sense that the world has undoubtedly changed in recent years with HVACR being no exception.

“One of the immediate challenges in our industry is gaps in the workforce across all roles. This is a potential roadblock to the work we have in front of us. The good news is we are aware of it and the industry is in agreement that we need to work together and build career-driven experiences for all those coming into the industry,” said Mark Stevens, manager of AHR Expo.

The show is uniquely positioned to offer an introduction to HVACR that highlights how one can aspire to build a lifelong career in HVACR. Each year, professionals gather to discuss issues and create solutions, and to showcase the very best of what’s to come. It is in this spirit the AHR Expo recognized an opportunity to widen the reach and purpose of some of the show’s key elements – access to professionals, new markets, products and technology as well as the cutting-edge development via the Innovation Awards.

“We’ve felt a shift for many years as innovation in our industry grows and the world wakes up to what HVACR currently offers and what it must succeed in for the future,” continued Stevens. “Inside the industry, we understand the immense responsibility to grow our workforce to maintain the demands of the future. We have a deep understanding of the way HVACR is a part of nearly every human experience in our built environment. The show is a unique opportunity to see everything all at once and connect with a broad audience within our community. With workforce growth being a focus in every corner, we sought to add value with our unique offering.”

The Need for a Growing Workforce

One thing of rising concern among all stakeholders is the need to strengthen the future workforce across all channels to support a growing industry.

The HVACR industry, like many, was already heading into a workforce deficit, as noted in prior years' [trend reports](#). With the onset of the pandemic, the industry took an even bigger hit with employee burnout, early retirement decisions and those drawn to the Great Resignation.

“The changes that this industry is going to be seeing over the next several years is immense – something that we’ve never seen,” said Stephen Yurek, president and CEO of AHRI while participating in a state of the industry panel at AHR Expo 2022. “Number one is just getting people into the industry. We’re going to be seeing a huge amount of retirements like we have already. Just getting people into the workforce and trained and ready to go.”

What’s more, HVACR became a vital effort in the return to normal after COVID19. Today, indoor air quality is discussed mainstream as an important mitigation factor for health and safety inside our built environment - something the industry has been raising awareness of for years. With this new spotlight, demand for HVACR solutions has increased tremendously. Likewise, the need for a motivated workforce to sustain and continue to grow the industry to meet demands.

Innovating the Innovation Awards

The AHR Expo introduced a workforce development initiative to expose potential industry professionals to HVACR in a moment when the industry shines brightest – all together under one roof with miles and miles of products and tech on display. The program is a means to honor the innovation that our professionals are bringing to market through the Innovation Awards while simultaneously supporting future innovators through mentorship and leadership.

In its inaugural year, AHR Expo invited Western High School, a local area high school with a dual academic program that graduates students certified and ready for hire as technicians in HVAC. The soon to graduate class was invited for a special field trip at the 2022 AHR Expo.

“We are humbled by the warm welcome from the surrounding communities that host our industry for the AHR Expo, and it is always our goal to give back in as many positive ways as we can during our visit,” stated Stevens. “Coming into Vegas, we married the initiatives of strengthening our industry as well as the hosting city community by supporting the growth of the local Las Vegas workforce.”

The AHR Expo set the goals of showcasing what the industry has to offer and how an individual can build a strong lifelong career in HVACR. The manufacturing community, industry associations, and training-focused professionals were eager to share in this experience. Manufacturers curated experiences in their booths for the students to ask questions, interact with experts and demo products; associations offered mentorship; and individuals offered personal experience and insight into the possibilities offered in the industry.

"While all the booths and presentations were amazing, I was most taken by how personally invested each of the presenters was in our students as the future of the HVAC industry. They genuinely wanted to support our students and direct them to a sustainable career," Michelle Dillmann, Counselor, Western High School.

Welcoming the next generation

During their visit, students were welcomed by ambassadors eager to guide them on a planned tour through the show floor. Colleen Keyworth and Angie Snow from Women in HVACR, and Bob Rohr and Mary Olsen from Caleffi North America guided 23 students – 6 women and 17 men– for in-booth visits, Q&A sessions and a scavenger hunt/trivia of HVACR knowledge.

The students had time to meet with members of the Podcast Pavilion, including a group discussion led by Rich and Kevin of The HVAC Jerks where they answered questions about career development, how to be more involved in the industry and general advice to begin their career.

"The AHR Expo was definitely inspirational and gave me more courage to continue in this field," Geraldine Avila, an 11th-grade student.

After spending a few hours on the floor, the students were hosted by Mike Mayberry (hvac_refer_guy) for a special presentation on resume building and expectations for joining the workforce. Mike covered topics such as skills and qualities employers look for in their team and how to market yourself as an attractive employee candidate. Mike also shared practical tips and advice to sustain a successful career, and the many ways one can grow a career through experiential gain and networking. Mike, a well-known industry champion of HVAC and the trades, extended his mentorship to each student in attendance, and in doing so demonstrated the strong community that HVACR offers to its professionals.

The students were engaged in his presentation, eagerly participating in the conversation, and enthralled with the practicality of information being presented. Lunch service chatter

revealed excitement in having met so many professionals dedicated to introducing them to the real HVACR experience and the warm welcome that was not expected but enthusiastically welcomed.

"The AHR Expo was a tremendous experience for the HVAC students of Western High School. Not only was the red carpet rolled out for our students, but they made great connections and now have a deeper understanding of industry opportunities. To be sure, this experience has greatly enhanced their career trajectory," said Antonio Rael, Principal of Western High.

Looking to the future

At the close of their visit, students were surprised by a wealth of generosity from industry manufacturers and exhibitors of the AHR Expo.

[Veto Pro Pac](#) gifted the students with their MB3 meter bag.

[Ridgid](#) gifted each student with a custom hat and a heavy-duty pipe wrench, as well as many items collected in the booth demonstration.

[Klein Tools](#) prepared a package with a full brim hardhat, their Pro Pack 6-piece apprentice toolset and an HVAC clamp meter.

[Fluke](#), a 2022 Innovation Award Winner, gifted each student a VoltAlert 1ACII non-contact voltage tester.

[DiversiTech](#) equipped each student with a [hilmor](#) tool package consisting of a tool bag, a quick-engage flare & swage kit, a tube bender, a 2-valve aluminum manifold, a dual readout thermometer, and various items to complete an apprentice toolset.

The well-rounded experience was a highlight of the AHR Expo's return. It served as an empowering addition to all the show aims to offer.

"The AHR Expo was a great place to see what HVAC students will do and achieve in the future," Jose Cortez, an 11th-grade student.

AHR Expo offers a unique opportunity for the full industry to come together and experience HVACR by seeing what's new, what's to come and what is needed. Inviting career candidates at the student level sets the stage for a true understanding of their potential and to see themselves as a part of the industry with realistic expectations and experiences, rather than a cold introduction. What's more, it gifts awareness to the size of the

community available to them, as opposed to only networking with a small set of members on their team.

“We are continuously looking to evolve the best experience for the industry and the professionals that work within it,” continued Stevens. “We observe the trends and needs of the industry and build strong partnerships to strengthen the foundation not only of the AHR Expo experience but also for a thriving industry for years to come. We are privileged to have made the connection with the Western High School community and we look forward to supporting HVACR in more exciting ways such as this experience in the future.”

The industry is poised to thrive but will require dedication to building and maintaining a strong workforce. Curating experiences that showcase career opportunities, the inspiring and dedicated community and the ability to fulfill purpose can support this. The AHR Expo is honored to play its part.

“To recruit people, we need them to see not only a career but also an impact. Because that's what most humans are looking for. They want to make a difference. They want to make things better. They want to be good stewards, whatever it happens to be. Most people come wanting to make things better. Let's share what we do to make things better.” Mick Schwedler, 2021-2022 ASHRAE president.

The AHR Expo plans to continue the expansion of this initiative in the years to come, working to develop similar experiences for engineering students, sales and marketing within the supply chain and anyone looking to build a lifelong career in HVACR.

“We are so inspired by the nurturing support of our industry's community,” concluded Stevens. “The number of people who have reached out looking to help us grow and connect our next generation audiences with established professionals is inspiring. This industry is like none other and we look forward to assisting where we can to close the workforce gap by working together with our strong partnerships.”

You can view a full video recap of the 2022 AHR Expo student visit [here](#).

To learn more about Western High School and its dual HVAC program, visit the school [website](#). For more information on the AHR Expo and the Innovation Awards, visit the [AHR Expo website](#).

The 2023 AHR Expo will be held at the Georgia World Congress Center in Atlanta, GA. Registration will open in the summer of 2022.

ABOUT THE AHR EXPO

The AHR Expo is the world's essential HVACR event, attracting the most comprehensive gathering of industry professionals from around the globe each year. The show provides a unique forum where manufacturers of all sizes and specialties, whether a major industry brand or innovative start-up, can come together to share ideas and showcase the future of HVACR technology under one roof. Since 1930, the AHR Expo has remained the industry's best place for OEMs, engineers, contractors, facility operators, architects, educators and other industry professionals to explore the latest trends and applications and cultivate mutually beneficial business relationships. The next show, co-sponsored by ASHRAE and AHRI, will be held Feb.6 - Feb. 8, 2023, in Atlanta, GA, and is held concurrently with ASHRAE's Winter Conference.

For more information, visit ahrexpo.com and follow @ahrexpo on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

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