

In The Spot Light



Hawkeye Institute of Technology Concrete Pipe Training

By Sue Marquette Poremba



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As a premier manufacturer of concrete pipe and manhole equipment, the Hawkeye Group has customers who have used its equipment for years, with a growing number of these customers upgrading to automated equipment. Also, many customers are making their first Hawkeye purchase ever. To assist all of these customers with information and skills that will allow them to operate and maintain the equipment, the Hawkeye Group now runs the Hawkeye Institute of Technology.

"The school is dedicated to empowering its students to give customers the knowledge and skills that allows them to

take ownership and pride in the operation of Hawkeye equipment," explained Tom Umek,

manager of customer service. "We offer different levels of schooling, based on the type of equipment, and we rotate them around."

Most of the training sessions are scheduled

According to Umek, the Hawkeye Group is "100% responsible for installing and servicing any of those pieces of equipment in Canada and the U.S. We have 130 of them in operation." The

MBK sessions that educate customers on the use of that equipment are not usually done in-house. "It's almost impossible to do this class in

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once a month at the Hawkeye Group's facility in Mediapolis, IA, but Umek said provisions can

be made for companies that need training in their own facilities. The sessions cover one of six areas of instruction: non-automated equipment, fully automated or VROC/ROCO equipment, pipe production methods, Pipemaster Unloaders, MBK classes, and form maintenance.

Hawkeye Group is the North American representative for the German-built MBK Cage Machines.

theory," Umek said, "so we meet at one of the facilities that has one, and that company will bring their people into that location and we'll do the training there." However, Umek said he hopes training will move into the Hawkeye facility within the next year or two, after they put in their own MBK machine.

The Pipe Production classes are geared to floor supervisors and plant foremen. In these classes, according to Umek, they are focused on the quality of the pipe, how you get good efficiency, how to staff the plant, and how you maintain the production levels the machines are capable of doing.

The Pipe Plus equipment, Umek explained, has been the foundation of the Hawkeye Group. "The very first thing we did is make a piece of equipment called the Pipe Master in the 1950s.



In the 1960s we came up with a VUP Machine – that stands for vibration under pressure – and that evolved into what we call the Pipe Plus Machine.” This equipment is very simple to run, he added, with little automation.

The Pipe Pro equipment is similar, but has more automation added and requires some additional training. These classes are more technical, Umek said. The automated machines don’t use much labor; instead they are operated robotically. “In the automated class, we’re teaching them about automation and basic electricity, so we cover hydraulics, pneumatics, electrical, and automation terminology.”

Learning the terminology is vital, Umek added. When the customer and the Hawkeye employees are using consistent terms for various equipment and its operational functions, questions or problems that come up can be solved with a phone conversation rather than more costly on-site visits.

Hawkeye Institute also teaches classes through the American Concrete Pipe Association. Hawkeye Group is an associate member of this organization, and the Institute presented four sessions at the Association’s recent conference in Orlando, FL.

Umek has been in charge of the Institute for over a year and a half. The school was started when a company bought a lot of equipment at once and needed training. It was so successful and changed the philosophy of the customer so much that Hawkeye realized they needed to provide this service for other clients.

One reason the training sessions are held at the Hawkeye facility is because many of their clients have never been to the plant and, according to Umek, it is an impressive sight. The facility is the size of three football fields, or about 150,000 square feet, and employs over 270 people. All of the engineering design is done within Hawkeye. “We created a culture for these people where their impression of Hawkeye is completely different than before they came,” Umek said. “Not only do they see the manufacturing facility, but they become familiar with people and they get to put names and faces together. What we develop is a culture that allows them to call anybody in our company. We can hook them straight up to an engineer if they have a problem. That’s what we



want them to come away with, that anyone at Hawkeye is available to them.”

A second reason why the training sessions are held in-house is the access to the machines and to the expertise. While Umek is in charge of running the classes, he utilizes the experience

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and knowledge of the Hawkeye employees who design and build the equipment. “I draw from people who are available,” he said.

The classes are limited in size to 12-14 students. Some classes might be smaller. Depending on the focus of the course, the training sessions last from two-and-a-half days to four days, seven hours per day. “For some,” Umek said, “this is their first class since high school.”

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they’ve had at their company and discuss them as a group.

More than 150 people have gone through the school so far, and many of the companies have sent second and third rounds of employees for instruction. “I get a critique sheet from everyone of them,” Umek said, “and there has not been a single negative comment.”

The only way to know how to maintain a piece of equipment is to know how to run it, Umek said, and by sending people to the school, he has seen plants go from struggling to being one of

the better plants within their organization.

Umek said training sessions for in-house people are in the works so sales people and consultants are able to improve their own level of customer service.

“We have one commitment,” Umek said. “It doesn’t matter how big or small the company. We want to train everyone equally.”

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