

## Moving forward together



Students check out a Scion tC, one of several autos displayed on the Academic Quad during RIT's first "Toyota Day."

### Toyota turns to RIT grads and co-ops to fill the company's increasing needs for skilled, motivated personnel

Toyota, now the leader in sales and most profitable auto manufacturer worldwide, has become a driving force at RIT as well.

- The company recruits on campus two or three times a year, and has hired more than 50 graduates in the past four years. Many have gone into the company's Engineer in Training (EiT) program, but Toyota

has hired grads from business, packaging science and the computer disciplines as well as engineers.

- The number of RIT students in co-op positions at Toyota has increased from one in the 2003-2004 academic year to more than 18 this year.
- RIT celebrated Toyota Day on campus

this spring in recognition of the company's \$100,000 gift to establish the Toyota Production Systems Laboratory in the Department of Industrial and Systems Engineering.

- Toyota donated \$50,000 in sponsorship for the 2007 Baja SAE Rochester World Challenge, an international student engineering design competition that took

place June 7-8 at RIT (see page 27). Toyota also gave \$5,000 each to RIT's Baja and Formula SAE teams.

There's logical reason for the strong connection: Toyota – which surpassed General Motors in total sales for the first quarter of this year – is growing worldwide and currently has 10 manufacturing plants in the U.S., two in Canada and one in Mexico, in addition to R&D facilities and sales and service networks. The company needs top-notch personnel.

That works out well for RIT co-ops and graduates who are looking for promising employment opportunities.

"There's clearly an alliance of our strengths and their needs," says Emanuel Contomanolis, associate vice president and director of Co-op and Career Services.

RIT grads are especially attractive because of the university's emphasis on hands-on, "experiential" learning, says Kimberly Demko, college relations representative, Toyota Motor Engineering & Manufacturing North America.

"We're looking for more than education," says Demko. "We're looking for a job fit. The co-op experience is a very big plus."

## Challenges and rewards

Todd Obbie '05 (manufacturing engineering technology) is proud to work for Toyota. "It's a great company," he says.

Obbie went to school part-time for 14 years to earn his degree and joined Toyota in 2005 after 18 years as a toolmaker and engineer with Acro Industries, Rochester. The new job meant relocating his family to Ohio, but the opportunity to use his skills and advance his career was exactly what he had been looking for.

"This is what I saw myself doing," says Obbie, now assistant manager, Supplier Commodity Engineering, Toyota Motor Engineering & Manufacturing North America, Erlanger, Ky. (near Cincinnati).

"The job is very challenging," he says. His current responsibilities involve working with companies that provide stamped metal components for the 2007 Tundra truck frame – "high risk commodities" that are critical to the vehicle.

His job goes beyond making sure that Toyota's manufacturing facilities get what they need from the suppliers. He also helps the suppliers develop their processes so they can be more successful – which, in turn, benefits Toyota.

That relates to kaizen – a Japanese word that translates to "continuous improvement." The concept is deeply rooted in Toyota culture, Obbie explains.



Todd Obbie '05, right, and Bill Lucas '06 with a Toyota Solara body side wall draw die.

"Employees – we call them team members – are constantly pushed to find a better way of doing things," says Obbie. "If you want the kind of job where you sit back and are told what to do, you don't want to work here."

**"On the employee badge it says, 'Continuous Improvement' and 'Respect for People'. Those are the two pillars we live by."**

Todd Obbie '05

In addition to his normal responsibilities, Obbie participates in regularly scheduled group sessions aimed at sharing skills and information. Members research specific assignments, then report what they've learned. "It's fun because it's something different," Obbie says, adding "You're expected to improve yourself."

"On the employee badge, it says 'Continuous Improvement' and 'Respect for People,'" says Obbie. "Those are the two pillars we live by."

## Opportunity knocks

When two RIT friends who had joined Toyota in 2005 came back to recruit at a career fair, Jorge Ciurlizza '06 (mechanical engineering technology) decided to apply. He calls the Engineer in Training (EIT) pro-

gram "one of the best opportunities I have had."

Upon entering the two-year EIT program in July 2006, he spent three months learning Toyota business and team development procedures followed by a nine-month

assignment at Toyota's facility in Fremont, Calif., where his work centered on problem-solving. For example, he was given the task of developing a system to monitor waste build-up in oil used to wash metal panels before stamping.

"Projects like this bring what we learned at school into the real world," says Ciurlizza, who recently began a year-long assignment at Toyota Motor Manufacturing Canada in Cambridge, Ont., Canada.

"I am very happy working for a great company," says Ciurlizza. "I hope the partnership between Toyota and RIT only grows stronger."

## Passion for excellence

A recruiter for Honda inadvertently helped Cory Hoffman '06 (mechanical engineer-



Cory Hoffman '06 with a Corolla in the "audit lab," where new vehicles are periodically evaluated.



Elton Pride '84

Southeast Toyota Distributors, a privately owned distributor for 38 years, franchises 169 dealerships in Florida, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina. Southeast Toyota is a division of JM Family Enterprises.

"It's been very rewarding," says Pride, who says that his graphic design background provided the strong computer technology foundation that helped launch his diverse career. "The way I look at it is it's about always being better – continual, incremental progress. I'm continually looking at what I do to see how I can improve. Even if we're doing a great job, we can always improve. The Japanese word for it is kaizen."

### On the grow

Nancy Fein '76 (applied mathematics) joined Toyota Motor Sales in 1982, when the company had only 1,500 employees in the U.S. Today the company employs more than 32,000 in its U.S. plants, sales and marketing operations and research and design facilities.



Nancy Fein '76

"Toyota was a much smaller company when I started," says Fein, vice president of Lexus Service, Parts, Customer Satisfaction and Training, Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A. "I saw opportunities but I certainly did not see

myself as a vice president of a Fortune 500 company and the largest car manufacturer in the world."

Fein, an RIT trustee, says she sees similarities between RIT and Toyota. Both are committed to continuous improvement, core values and a strong work ethic. That's why RIT grads are a good fit for Toyota – and vice versa.

"We're looking for the best talent," says Fein. "The people we're hiring now will be the leaders 10, 15, 20 years from now. We want people who are challenged and engaged because they will make everything happen in the future."

Kathy Lindsley

RIT Works! focuses on the contributions of RIT graduates in the workplace.

ing) get a job at Toyota.

"The funny story is I went to Honda first," says Hoffman. "At the career fair in the fall of 2005, I talked to a Honda engineer, showed him my resume. He told me he didn't see anything that showed I had a passion for cars."

Hoffman left the fair, went to the Student Government office (he was then vice president), re-wrote his resume and went to the Toyota booth. He entered the Engineer in Training program (with Ciurlizza and several other RIT grads) in July 2006.

"We're given a lot of independence," Hoffman says. "Really, what it comes down to is can you think logically, can you work in teams, and can you solve problems. The project management work I did at RIT has helped tremendously."

During the first year as an EiT, Hoffman spent nine months working in the San Francisco area doing testing and research on the Toyota Corolla. He's now working in assembly engineering on Lexus models in Cambridge, Ont., Canada.

Hoffman had other job offers, but "nothing as exciting, or as diverse as this. I figured, where else will I get to do engineering with cars, see the country, and get paid?"

### Toyota on campus

Starting this fall, RIT engineering students will have the opportunity to learn about Toyota techniques in the new Toyota Production Systems Laboratory. The lab will support a required course, Design

and Analysis of Production Systems, in the Industrial and Systems Engineering department. Related to the creation of the lab, Jacqueline Mozrall '87 (industrial engineering), department head, and Andres



Jacqueline Mozrall '87

Carrano, assistant professor, became the first faculty members from any university to receive training at Toyota's engineering and manufacturing facility in Erlanger, Ky.

"Toyota is recognized as having the 'model' production system that companies across the world have tried to emulate," says Mozrall. "To be associated with Toyota in this way is an exciting opportunity for the Industrial and Systems Engineering faculty and students."

### Selling points

Although the recent focus of the burgeoning relationship between RIT and Toyota has been technology, over the years a number of grads have enjoyed successful careers in the sales and service side of the business.

Elton Pride '84 (graphic design) joined Southeast Toyota Distributors in 1989 as a computer technology specialist. Since then, he's worked as manager of planning and communications, parts and service marketing manager, manager of e-commerce, manager of Scion development and, most recently, as retail training manager.