

PREPARING THE NEXT GENERATION MISSION CRITICAL WORKFORCE

The Carolinas chapter of 7 X 24 Exchange pioneered efforts to develop the mission critical workforce of the future through its National Consortium for Mission Critical Operations (NCMCO) initiative. The initiative established a certification program at Cleveland Community College and Wake Tech in partnership with the NC education commission. This was just the first step. The Carolinas 7 X 24 vision was to grow the program into four-year colleges, then to Masters programs, and beyond.

The demand for competent data center operators continues to grow rapidly, yet qualified candidates remain sparse. Chapter board member James explains, "Operating a data center requires unique candidate characteristics. These characteristics span many unrelated disciplines. A highly sought-after candidate will possess skills in the electrical, mechanical, networking, hardware, and automation technologies, to name a few. They'll need to be excellent at assessing operations risks. They'll need to be excellent at proactively recognizing operational challenges. They'll need to be excellent at developing and adhering to processes and be excellent in communications. You can see quickly how this narrows the pool of candidates tremendously."

James identifies several gaps in traditional career paths that have limited the number of candidates coming into the industry. "On-the-job training is one means, yet the process is flawed and slow," he says. "Digging into the education system, you find obvious gaps." First is a lack of understanding of the industry. "Exactly what is this critical data center environment? The candidate qualifications and certifications are inconsistent. Also, the education system has characteristically taught in a serial, single-career-path style and has not built a path to develop resources needed for candidates to operate in this multi-discipline, critical environment."



“The leaders of our industry have come together to develop the means to address the education gaps,” says James. But chapter efforts are now reaching into a new phase of the NCMCO program.

What are some current efforts to recruit and train a diverse corps of mission critical employees?

WELCOME TO THE CLUB



Women in Mission Critical Operations (WIMCO) is supporting a Carolinas 7 X 24 effort to establish a chapter club at NC State. Robin Aron describes how she sees the rollout. First, new board member Jennifer Clark will connect with NC State’s engineering department to find out how to best get the club started and find a faculty advisor who would be willing to oversee it. The Carolinas chapter will “help with content and information, keep them updated on when we’re having events, and maybe get speakers for them. Finally, we will also seek a student leader to spearhead

the club.” Robin says the club will allow WIMCO and the chapter to “promote STEM education and provide opportunities for WIMCO regarding diversification within the industry.” It will be an opportunity to “recruit women into that club, and provide a pool of resources for us in terms of giving scholarships to engineering and STEM students.” She adds that, “We’re hoping that students can drive the university to see a need for a degree in mission critical operations. That’s the ultimate win.”

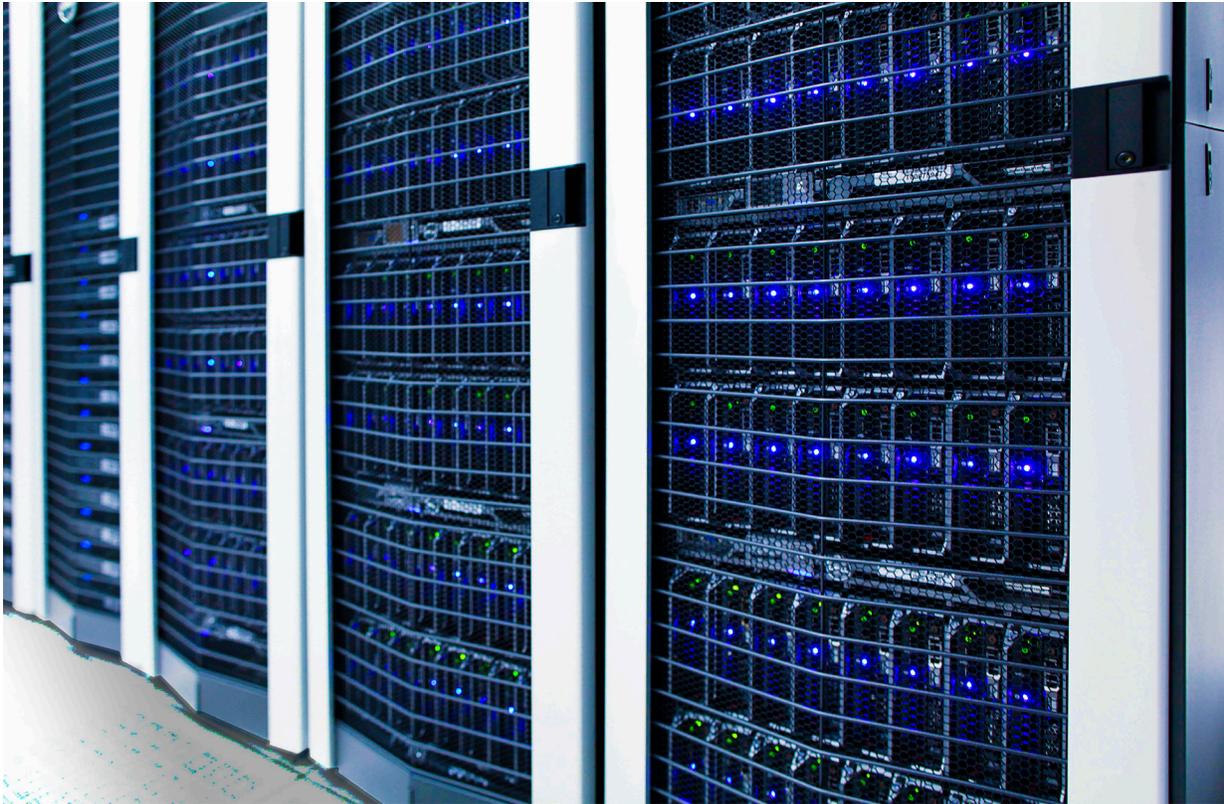
Beginning an MCO program at the community college level was just the first step in demonstrating a career path from there to a Bachelors degree and on to a Masters. Starting a 7 X 24 club at NC State is a step toward taking the program into four-year universities. “The 7 X 24 Exchange Northern California chapter has piloted this effort and experienced great success with the development of an active 7 X 24 Club on the campus of California Polytechnic State University,” she says.



© Immedion

7x24carolinas.org

7x24 Exchange The Carolinas Chapter | Tel: (336) 273.9587 | Fax: (336) 272.4162 | info@7x24carolinas.org



© Immedion

DATA CENTER 101

The theme of the 2017 International 7 X 24 Exchange conference was “Shaping the Future.” So Carolinas chapter member Dennis Cronin’s conference program offering, Data Center 101, was a perfect fit. The two-hour session is specifically designed to educate college students and professors about what goes on inside data centers and the career opportunities available. Five industry experts covered the driving factors of a data center; architectural, mechanical, electrical, and plumbing considerations; operations; and careers in the industry.

We need talented employees “who can work with their hands as well as their minds,” says Dennis. He sees this session as “opening students’ eyes to a new opportunity in an arena that has not been addressed. Data centers pull together all of the disciplines of STEM programs—it touches each one of them. One of the things we are emphasizing in the program is that students and professors need to get on board in terms of all of the different disciplines needed, not just in one specific area. Students need to be trained in multiple areas and have multiple talents, as opposed to just focusing on one area.”

CMCO Is Preferred

Tony Rossi reports that, “Google and Disney have changed their job descriptions for data center facility engineers to include the MCO certification as a desired credential. We in 7 X 24 know that the NCMCO educational system being built and the credentials obtained are meaningful, but people who haven’t heard of it yet can’t tell it apart from a course that you pay \$2,500 for and go to Phoenix for a weekend to take a test and come out with a credential. Having companies like Google and Disney post the CMCO as a preferred credential is big.”

7x24carolinas.org

7x24 Exchange The Carolinas Chapter | Tel: (336) 273.9587 | Fax: (336) 272.4162 | info@7x24carolinas.org

The learning experience did not stop after the two-hour session. Dennis says, “We emphasize to students the need to network and to develop contacts as early as possible and to expand that networking arrangement throughout their careers. We took them from the Sunday afternoon session to the Sunday evening networking event, and then had them networking for the next two and a half days of the conference.” The formula worked out well, as there were 34 attendees for the session. “About half were either students or professors, and the balance were people in the industry looking to expand their knowledge,” says Dennis. He also reports that based on conversations afterward, the feedback was very positive.

In addition to the Data Center 101 offering, Dennis says that 7 X 24 Exchange International and the Carolinas chapter have members “who are ready, willing, and able to mentor students about data centers and what they need to be successful in the industry.”

FOSTERING DIVERSITY

Another goal of the NCMCO program is to promote diversity. Tony Rossi is chair of the Carolinas chapter education committee. He says, “The fact that we are targeting the community college system is going to add diversity to the workforce. There has not been a formalized training program that leads into mission critical operations outside of a few military programs such as the Navy nuclear power program, which is 95 percent male and not very ethnically diverse either.” He points out that those who have historically worked in the industry, such as journeyman electricians and mechanics, are not part of very diverse groups. He notes that the focused nature of learning a useable skill in two years rather than a generalized one in four is attractive to young people. “The fact that we are targeting people who are looking at their career and education in terms of modern trade training is immediately opening us up to a wider range of potential employees.” The number of “young women in the community college programs now, proportionally speaking, is five times the ratio now in the industry.” He adds, “We’ve made it a point when we learn about female students to nudge ourselves in there and make sure someone in WIMCO gets paired up with them.”



An MCO Roadmap on how to establish a program like NCMCO is available by [clicking here](#).

***Robin Aron** is vice president of sales and marketing at Envirotrol and president of the Carolinas 7x24 chapter*

***Dennis Cronin** is CEO of Resilient Solutions, LLC.*

***Tony Rossi** is strategic sourcing manager for BGIS.*