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Today is March 08, 2006

Current Temperature: 31° in Lewiston, Maine

FOLLOWING THE FRESHMEN

For the next 9 months the Sun Journal will follow five local students as they experience their freshmen year in college. Read and interact with them here.

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By Robert S. Michaud, P.E., Principal - Michaud Engineering
 Monday, February 20, 2006

When many people think of engineers, they think of the people who design and build things that we use every day. However, research and design are only part of what engineers engage in today. Many of us focus our efforts on operating, maintaining and improving the things and processes that are already in use. It may not seem as glamorous as developing the latest gadget, but the methods and creativity used to solve these real life problems are no less rewarding for those who have chosen this path.

Engineering is fundamentally the application of science and technology to practical applications. Technology continuously changes, and it is just as important to make the best use of it after products have left the factory, as it was to create them. An example of this is your desktop or notebook computer. If you are still using the same computer today that you had ten years ago, it is not likely that you are as productive as someone with the latest model. The same holds true for many of the assets and systems we rely on every day. However, not all systems lose their usefulness or efficiency at the same rate. This is where an experienced engineer can help make the most out of the assets that you currently have, and recommend the timely replacement of those that are holding you back.

So, do you know what you have? That is the first question that needs to be addressed. It seems so very basic, but many companies don't really understand all that they have for assets and equipment. Without this information, opportunities for improvement and cost savings are overlooked. In today's highly competitive business environment, missing key components in the operations and maintenance cost structure could spell the difference between success and failure in the marketplace.

Engineers with the right qualifications and experience can help identify what you have, starting with the building and the building support systems (electrical, mechanical, structural, etc). They can help you identify systems which are approaching the end of their useful life, that can be improved with new technology, or that should be replaced for safety concerns. This information can be used to budget and project capital spending requirements and eliminate surprises.

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Other engineers focus on parts of the manufacturing process, and can help you find ways to improve yours. Even if your company employs manufacturing, maintenance, process or project engineers, outside firms can bring a new perspective and different experience to the table to help solve problems and give you the edge over your competition.

If you are currently an engineering student or are considering the engineering profession, open your mind to the broader possibilities that await you upon graduation. While the excitement of designing the latest gadget drew many of us to engineering, the world offers many more ways to employ the creativity and problem solving skills that you will begin to learn in college, and continue to develop throughout your career.

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