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Making It Home For The Holidays And More

As we get around to putting a bow on our December issue each year, I tend to cast about for some holiday-esque theme to put smiles on your faces. This year, I thought you might be interested in my year-end plans… I'm outta' here (Chicagoland) soon, bound for the Rio Grande Valley of Texas to spend a couple of weeks with my little mamma and wonderful brothers.

The family business is onions—*and December is a busy month at the J.F. Palmer & Sons shed in San Juan.* Big, beautiful, sweet Texas 1015s grown in Mexico will start coming north across the Pharr Bridge in mid-January to be run through my brothers' operations and shipped to a wholesaler or retailer near you. Like any planned shutdown/turnaround/outage, there will be plenty to do in getting the machinery and facilities ready for what is expected to be a great 2013 season.

As anyone who has visited the Valley lately will tell you, though, food production (farming and ranching) and other agriculture-related activities aren't the primary drivers of the economy these days.
The manufacturing sector (in this case, maquiladoras on the Mexican side of the river), oil & gas production and health-care facilities with their complex, mission-critical physical plants are booming—
and demanding increasingly skilled workers. Like other regions,business and educational leaders in the Valley are now banding together to meet that need. I'm putting a spotlight on one such collaboration as an example of a success story in the works (or, let's hope, many success stories in the works).

Only time will tell, but Texas State Technical College (TSTC) seems to be on the right track—*with no less than Texas Governor Rick Perry singing its praises.*
According to a November 27, 2012, article in
Valley Morning Star
by Allen Essex, which was also carried in
The McAllen Monitor
(
www.themonitor.com
), TSTC's skilled-workforce efforts hope to reduce the time to prepare workers for jobs by focusing only on skills they need. As Governor Perry noted, that translates into cutting by 50% the time necessary for a student fresh out of high school to enter a technical field. But that's not all. Having written so often in *MT* about the challenges we face in preparing a skilled workforce, a couple of other stated goals of the TSTC program were like music to my eyes and ears:

According to TSTC Chancellor Mike Reeser, returning veterans will receive credit for their military training and be able to move directly to the courses they need to prepare for civilian jobs. The program also aims to benefit students who might have entered a conventional college program but can't return because of low grade points—*or because they didn't want to go to a conventional college to begin with.* As the Essex article characterized it, those students may have been pushed by parents to attend a four-year college, or enrolled because their friends were going. (Imagine that!)

I'm looking forward to visiting with the TSTC program organizers when I'm in the Valley and letting you in on what I learn. For now, let me wish you a glorious holiday of your own. You can count on me to be toasting all of our readers as I spend a little downtime in Nuevo Progresso! **MT**

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