

# Be open to opportunity, recommends firefighter turned automation technician

Growing up in Dinuba, David Corpus dreamed of being a firefighter and sampled several different careers before discovering Industrial Maintenance at College of the Sequoias (COS). "I've done a lot of labor jobs, starting with working in the fields with my family at age 14," said Corpus. "School was not really for me but I knew education would lead to making a good living. The COS Industrial Maintenance Technology program helped me find a great job in automated manufacturing with the best co-workers, constantly changing technology and interesting work that supports my family and allows us to enjoy overseas vacations."

The surprising thing about Corpus choosing Industrial Maintenance is that he didn't have an early interest in car repair, robotics teams or using hand tools. "I'd never thought about a career in automation," said Corpus. "At COS, we were introduced to everything we needed to get started in a manufacturing or equipment maintenance career in the one-year program. With help from the COS Career Technical Education (CTE) Career Services, I was introduced to employers and found a fantastic job in industrial automation that I've had for several years."

Corpus tried several careers before the COS Industrial Maintenance program changed his career path. When he was 19, he achieved his goal of becoming a firefighter while attending Reedley College. "I worked as a Paid Call Firefighter (PCF) with Tulare County for four years and worked two fire seasons as a Wildland Fire Fighter," said Corpus. "I liked it so much that I switched to studying Wildland Fire Technology. Unfortunately, I got busy living life and was one class short of finishing the degree."

Since firefighting was seasonal work, Corpus worked in labor and retail jobs before he started working for a water-well drilling company. "We were really busy during the drought," said Corpus. "I enjoyed the drilling work, especially driving excavators, loaders and water trucks. Then, we had a rainy winter and I was out of a job in 2017 when the company downsized."

Being laid-off put Corpus at a career crossroads. "I'm first generation American on both sides of my family," said Corpus. "My sisters and I knew that college would open more opportunities for us. After becoming unemployed and in-between fire seasons, I was looking for something more stable. A friend told me about an industrial maintenance program at a private college that sounded intriguing but it was very expensive. Then, my wife discovered that COS had a one-year Industrial Maintenance Technology certificate program." The COS program prepares students to repair modern automated machinery and covers basic electricity, mechanics, hydraulics and pneumatics, machining, motor control repair and design, programmable logic controllers, refrigeration and welding.

Corpus enrolled in the Industrial Maintenance program at the COS Hanford campus. "I didn't know what to expect and was nervous about learning a new trade," said Corpus. "I hadn't worked on projects around the house or taken technology classes so I was unfamiliar with everything except the welding. It made it easier that all the students were together for the four sections -- electronics, pneumatics, hydraulics and welding -- so we could help each other."



At first, Corpus felt out of his depth. “After talking to the COS Student Success Coordinator, I realized this course was nothing like I’ve ever encountered before,” said Corpus. “I committed more time to studying than I was used to, improved my note taking skills and above all, asked a lot more questions than I had previously. The instructor was really knowledgeable and stayed after class to help us. Several of the students were part of a study app so we could help each other.”

As part of the Industrial Maintenance program, students were encouraged to take advantage of events to connect with employers. “Lisette Conway from CTE Career Services at COS helped me update my resume and include experience that would make me stand out to employers,” said Corpus. “When COS hosted local companies at the Entrée to Employment dinner, I met with several prospective employers. As a result, I landed a two-week, paid internship with Serpa Packaging Solutions in Visalia.”

Before the internship, Corpus had intended to find work with a school district in industrial maintenance. “At Serpa, it was amazing to experience a fast-paced manufacturing environment making integrated robots that automate the packaging process for customers,” said Corpus. “When Serpa offered me the position of Electrical Assembly Technician, Lisette from COS guided me in what questions to ask before I made a decision. One consideration was that I’d have to provide my own tools which would be a financial setback. I was won over by Serpa’s offer of working a day shift, excellent pay and growth opportunities.”

Corpus hasn’t looked back. “I enjoy what I do -- assembling panels with relays, fasteners, wires and electronics that are part of the automated system – because every assembly is different,” said Corpus. “The COS Industrial Maintenance program prepared me with the fundamental knowledge to get started in this career. I frequently use what I learned at COS about hydraulics, reading schematics, trouble shooting and critical thinking.”



David Corpus and Lisette Conway at Serpa

It has turned into a very satisfying career. “The best thing about my job at Serpa is working closely with really great people,” said Corpus. “I am constantly learning and using the latest technology. It is a lot of fun working for a company that is a leader in designing and manufacturing automated equipment to make cartons, sleeves and trays used in packaging, and robotic palletizers.”

With a love of travel, Corpus was excited to be asked to go to client sites. “I’ve been to Texas, Kentucky and North Carolina to set up equipment,” said Corpus. “Customers love us. It is so satisfying to help them get the new systems up and running, see how they are using our automated equipment and learn what it means for their businesses.”

Take advantage of the support services at COS, suggests Corpus. “Asking Lisette at COS for help guided me to a counselor who suggested I sign up for one last class,” said Corpus. “That resulted in earning an Associate of



Mario Bringetto, Hanford Industrial Maintenance Instructor, with David Corpus on graduation day.

Science degree as well as a certificate in Industrial Maintenance Technology from COS. I even completed an Associate of Arts degree in Liberal Studies from Reedley College, resulting in two degrees.”

Corpus also recommends being open to new opportunities, even when it might not be what you initially had in mind for your career goals. “I found a really interesting, well–paid career in automated manufacturing by changing my path, enrolling in industrial maintenance at COS, buckling down to study and taking an internship,” said Corpus. “Even though I never imagined working in innovative technology, it has turned out to be a terrific career with lots of growth potential. I’d highly recommend a career in industrial automation.”