

## Businesses stand behind Bradley Tech

BY RICH KIRCHEN  
rkirchen@bizjournals.com

Milwaukee-area businesses are pledging continued support of Bradley Tech High School, despite a rash of recent negative publicity that included national media coverage of a post-basketball game brawl Jan. 30.

Several major Milwaukee businesses have donated millions of dollars in

cash, equipment, supplies and staff time in recent years to make Bradley Tech a model high school that will prepare students for jobs.

**Dick Pieper**  
Pieper Electric Inc.

But instead of attracting attention for innovative education, Bradley Tech lately has received local and national media coverage for student fights. The Jan. 30 melee after the boys basketball game between Bradley Tech and Bay View High School aired on CNN with the title "basket-brawl." In another major incident, students on Jan. 8

## BRADLEY TECH: Despite problems, businesses still supportive of Milwaukee high school

CONTINUED FROM A1

used cell phones to call outsiders to join a fight that spilled outside the school building at 700 S. Fourth St. on Milwaukee's south side.

Bradley Tech supporters in the business and labor communities acknowledged that the recent violence is disturbing and disappointing. But it hasn't shaken their faith in Bradley Tech's mission, they said.

They noted that the school, in its fifth year, is delivering on the promise to graduate more students and send more on to better futures via technical colleges and apprenticeships.

"The violence obviously has been disturbing, but the GPA is up, attendance is up and disruptions are down," said Lyle Balistreri, president of the Milwaukee Building and Construction Trades Council. "We just don't get any good press over that."

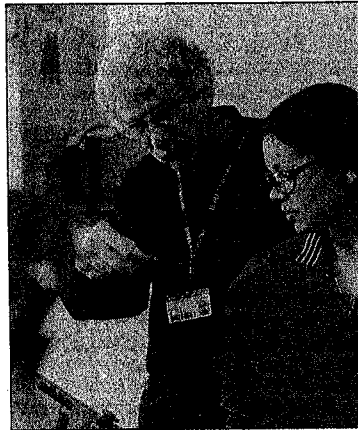
Dick Pieper, chairman of the company that owns Pieper Electric Inc., a Milwaukee electrical contractor, visited Bradley Tech the day of the Bay View game to talk with seniors about careers. His company has donated \$1 million to the school for an academy called the Pieper-Power Small Learning Community of Construction.

Pieper said he saw no discord in the hallways that day, and was impressed with the students he met. He said he's encouraged by Bradley Tech's progress and recent events won't cause him to withdraw his support.

"It's not the school, it's the society," he said.

### SUPPORT CONTINUING

Representatives of two of the four other companies that have been the largest donors to Bradley Tech said they will continue to sup-



SCOTT PAULUS

port the school, but declined further comment. They are Rockwell Automation, which donated \$1.75 million for machinery and robotics and factory automation programs; and AT&T Wisconsin, which donated \$1.25 million in machinery and software for electronics and engineering programs.

Declining to comment on Bradley Tech were Wisconsin Energy Corp., which has provided about \$1 million for welding machinery and instructor support, and Harley-Davidson Inc., which has donated \$1.3 million for manufacturing instruction and soundproofing classrooms. In addition, Harley-Davidson assigned

a full-time employee to the school for three years.

Balistreri, who serves on a corporate donors group and the independent commission that oversees the school, said the donors group met Jan. 29, the day before the post-game fight, and agreed to continue support for the school. The donor group consists of representatives of businesses that have provided cash, equipment, supplies or staff to the school.

The 1,560-student school is run by a commission represented by business, education and government, and is chaired by retired Miller Brewing Co. president Jack McDonough.

McDonough was unavailable for comment.

The foundation of late Milwaukee philanthropist Jane Bradley Pettit, the daughter of the co-founder of Allen-Bradley Co., now Rockwell, provided \$20 million in seed money to build Bradley Tech. Another \$13 million in private donations and \$23.6 million in public funding paid for the project that replaced the old Milwaukee Tech.

Tom Backes, a retired Milwaukee public school teacher, who the Bradley Tech commission hired as the liaison between the school and the business community, defended the school against the negative publicity. He said the media attention overshadows the school's positive developments.

Backes cited a Rockwell-led team of Bradley Tech and Rufus King students who competed in robotics competitions; recent interest by Bucyrus International and several other Milwaukee-area manufacturers and contractors in training students; and donations of materials and equipment from several companies.

"People called after the fights and said, 'Is there anything we can do to help you?' rather

than, 'What the hell is going on?'" Backes said.

Bradley Tech principal Ed Kovochich noted that only two Tech students were among those arrested in the so-called "basket-brawl." Teachers and administrators at the school said the majority of problems are caused by outsiders and by students who didn't choose Bradley Tech to pursue careers in the trades or manufacturing.

The school, like all Milwaukee Public Schools' high schools, has to accept its share of "at-risk" students, including those suspended from other schools and reassigned to Tech, and those who were in the juvenile corrections system.

### MORE GRADUATES

Considering that Bradley Tech is striving to be a world-class trade and technical school, some staff and commission members would like to screen or block prospective transfers who don't expressly choose the school. So far, they have not officially sought such a policy change.

Bradley Tech administrators list the school's accomplishments to include an 85 percent graduation rate compared with 55 percent at the old Milwaukee Tech. In addition, more than 80 percent of graduates head for jobs, apprenticeships or college. The number of Bradley Tech graduates now attending Milwaukee Area Technical College is 60, compared with six in the late 1990s. The school ranks third among MPS high schools in overall student performance, behind only college-prep King and the School of the Arts.

"The students that are in class are enthusiastic about the trades," said Tony Scaffidi, a technical support engineer at Pieper Electric.