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Education lifts city

High number of engineers, other professions key to Monterrey's emergence

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MONTERREY, Mexico -- Low-cost labor might have been the driving force that brought Steris Corp. to Monterrey, but the availability of engineers wasn't far behind.

It's hard to say if it's a marketplace that favors the employer or the employee, but Jose Nieto, an engineering supervisor for Steris here, said there's no shortage of engineering jobs available.

"Let's say Steris left, which I know they won't, you could find another job pretty quickly. I don't see an issue with that," he said.

That's not to suggest there aren't lots of engineers on the market, a large number of whom were trained in Monterrey and in the state of Nuevo León, home to more than 30 colleges and universities with an enrollment of about 150,000 students.

Of that total, the state graduates an average of 5,000 engineering students a year, a large share of those from Monterrey Tech. The school, founded 64 years ago by graduates of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, is regarded as among the region's most prestigious schools. And there's nothing tenuous here about the link between education and industry.

Monterrey Tech "was founded to link itself with industry in order to (train) the professionals to fulfill needs of industry," said Jorge Lozano Guzman, director of communications for the university.

The university's goals, however, extend well beyond training engineers for industry.

The university has a specific goal of training engineers who will be entrepreneurs, Guzman said.

"That is one of the most important visions of this institution," he said.

Statistics from the Nuevo León department of economic development reinforce the notion that education is especially important in this portion of Mexico. The average education level for the nation's work force is just 8.7 years, compared to 10.1 years in Nuevo León.

In Erie County, census numbers show that 85 percent of all adults have earned a high school diploma.

Education is more than a bragging point for this region of Mexico. It's why low-cost labor jobs are going to factories near the U.S.-Mexican border and why more skilled jobs are moving to Monterrey, said Carlos Alvarado, business development manager for the Prodensa Group, a shelter company that helps companies relocate to Mexico.

And it's also why Steris Corp. picked Monterrey, said Stephen Norton, the company's director of corporate communications.

"Access to an experienced and educated work force was a key site selection consideration," he said.

"Monterrey, with its large base of multinational corporations and well-regarded technical schools, colleges and universities churning out thousands of graduates with advanced degrees in a wide range of disciplines, was rated as the best site."

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