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It’s No Small Change
The transformation from student to leader often starts with joining SkillsUSA. For state high-school president Brian Garcia, adapting to many upheavals at a young age made him an early expert on leadership.
BY ANN P. SCHREIBER

‘Air’ Line: An Investment in Time
The Air Products company’s partnership with SkillsUSA crosses the financial bottom line into full involvement at all levels. “We believe that if we can contribute and help strengthen SkillsUSA programs, then we’re both going to win,” says executive Mike DeCastro.
BY TOM KERCHEVAL

Lost and Found
Looking for answers about his adoption left Nick Daddona unhappy with his life. After changing careers and finding his birth mother on a Mohawk reservation, he’s helping relieve others of their pain.
BY CRAIG E. MOORE

On the Cover:
SkillsUSA Champion Paul Satyanathan of Tiffin, Ohio. Photo by Lloyd Wolf.
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Visit SkillsUSA’s frequently updated Web site, with SkillsUSA champions on every page!
How can I set my goals for the best return on investment?

**Tim:** We often think of investments in terms of money, but have you ever considered the skills and relationships you are developing? If you think of your future as a puzzle, you can start assembling the pieces to fit your goals every day, and while it may seem like a mystery, you can always look to others for guidance.

In this issue, you’ll find many examples of students and business partners investing in their future and of SkillsUSA changing their outlook. Our students share their stories of learning leadership, being fulfilled by helping others, and connecting to peers through our alumni association.

Many business partners have discovered something special through their investment in SkillsUSA. As Laurie Gostley-Hackett of Fortune 500 company Air Products says, “We’re blessed to support financially, but just as important as our check is our time. Every hour we spend with an advisor or with a student judging a competition, walking into a lab, looking at curriculum, we’re investing that into tomorrow’s work force.”

Developing relationships with successful people in business and industry is one of the best investments of time you’ll ever make. Reach out to business, to community leaders and to the mentors in your school. Try doing something new or really mastering a concept where you already have some strength. Your puzzle will steadily take shape, and your investment will begin to pay off.

Spring is one of the best times of the year to get further involved in SkillsUSA. It’s when chapter work, technical skill development, competitions, service projects and leadership opportunities all culminate. The work you do in your local chapter all year will pay off in the results you see for yourself and those around you.

Air Products executive Mike DeCastro sums up why both SkillsUSA advisors and business partners give so much: “A partnership does not always have to be bottom-line driven. When you have the chance to make a difference in a student’s life, that’s the return on investment.”

I really respect the investment that each business partner makes in our program, and I know you do, too. To every student, teacher and administrator, I also admire the investment you are making to keep SkillsUSA the premier national student organization in work force and professional development.

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Got questions about SkillsUSA or other topics? E-mail anyinfo@skillsusa.org or send a letter to the address on the facing page. Put “Ask Tim” in the subject line or mail address.
Making Former SkillsUSA Members Current Again

It’s not over until we — SkillsUSA — say it’s over. And we say your involvement in the world’s greatest student organization of all time (how’s that for unbiased journalism?) never has to end.

SkillsUSA has served more than 10 million members since 1965, and the SkillsUSA Alumni and Friends Association was formed to give those former members the chance to give back to the organization that gave so much to them.

Over the last few years, SkillsUSA has refocused its efforts on building the alumni association, and numbers are growing fast. So if your time in SkillsUSA is coming to an end, remember: it doesn’t have to be. And if you’re a former member, we’d love to welcome you back home.

Besides, membership is free, and it has its privileges. You’ll even get a snazzy membership card! For more, visit: www.skillsusa.org/supporters/alumni.shtml.

Engineering an Alliance

When two technical education titans like TSA (Technology Student Association) and SkillsUSA join forces, big things are bound to happen — and they have. To form the Engineering Alliance, the two nonprofits have partnered with Project Lead the Way (PLTW), an organization that promotes engineering and biomedical science courses.

The Engineering Alliance will offer STEM-related (science, technology, engineering and math) activities for PLTW students to participate in. They’re designed to support teachers and excite students about technology, innovation and engineering. For more, visit: www.engineeringalliance.org.

The SkillsUSA Alumni and Friends Association is now on Facebook. Send a friend request and join the extended SkillsUSA family. Visit: www.skillsusa.org/supporters/alumnifacebook.shtml for more.
LEADERSHIP DESERVES A REWARD

Do you want to take your leadership skills to the next level with national leadership training, but your school doesn’t have the resources to make it happen? Then you are why the Student Leadership Development Scholarship was created.

The scholarship was established with financial support from Robert L. Flint, a former Caterpillar executive and longtime SkillsUSA supporter. It provides eight students with either $1,300 to attend the National Leadership and Skills Conference in June or $800 to attend the Washington Leadership and Training Institute in September.

However, only SkillsUSA state directors may submit applications on behalf of scholarship candidates. So, if you’re interested — or if you’re a teacher who knows a deserving student — contact your state association director for more info. For your director’s contact information, visit: www.skillsusa.org/about/dir4.shtml.

More Scholarship Opportunities
The SkillsUSA Alumni and Friends Association is offering an annual merit-based $500 scholarship to a qualifying student. The scholarship will recognize leadership, commitment to community service, and improvement to the image of career and technical education. The Sharon Melton Myers Memorial Scholarship will also provide $500 to a graduating SkillsUSA member to be used for continuing education. For more on these and all current scholarship opportunities, visit: www.skillsusa.org/students/scholarships.shtml.

A Big Change in Our Big Event
So more can attend, SkillsUSA’s national conference Opening Ceremony is moving to Wednesday that week in June. See: www.skillsusa.org for updates.

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Brian Garcia doesn’t mind being labeled an Army brat. He doesn’t mind that he had to switch schools every year until recently, and he’s adapted to his dad serving in Afghanistan.

It seems the only difficulty he’s had moving around the country has been climate. “I’m still not used to the cold, and I’ve lived here almost four years now,” the New York resident proclaims.

Born in Puerto Rico, Garcia came to the U.S. mainland at a young age when his father was assigned to a base in Texas. The family later moved to Oklahoma and then to Fort Drum, N.Y., about 26 miles from the Canadian border.

“In Puerto Rico, I was really talkative,” Garcia remembers. “I talked to everyone. I didn’t care who they were or how they looked. When I came to the United States, I tried doing that, but I didn’t speak English. I became really shy. But I was determined to learn English and learn as much as I possibly could so I could talk to more people.”

His eyes shine with enthusiasm when recalling the places he’s lived and the people he’s met.

“My entire family, except for one uncle, lives in Puerto Rico. The only people to ever leave the island were my [immediate] family and my uncle’s family.

“When I was born, my parents needed more money. My parents couldn’t finish college. They weren’t wealthy,” he explains, and at the time Puerto Rico was suffering an economic crisis. “So my dad joined the Army. He left for Georgia for six months, came back and served for several years in Puerto Rico before we were assigned to Fort Hood, Texas.”

The young boy learned English by sitting outside of his house and listening to people as they walked by. Then his parents enrolled him in a bilingual school where the main priority was to teach all required subjects and a second language at the same time.

“My classes were literally half Spanish, half English,” Garcia says.
"I never repeated at a school in Texas. I always had a different school each year, because bilingual schools within the district would change."

Later, with his family moving, Garcia had to start classes in a new place every year until high school. The SkillsUSA member now attends Charles H. Bohlen Technical Center in Watertown, N.Y.

A respect for education and service

Garcia’s father, Benjamin, a warrant officer, served in the Gulf War and did a tour in Korea. After being deployed to Afghanistan, he was due to come back to Fort Drum last September for a brief break. But although Garcia had not seen his father for more than six months, they decided another opportunity was too big to pass up. SkillsUSA’s Washington Leadership Training Institute was being held the same week.

“Im a big history guy. Washington, D.C., is full of history. I like politics, I don’t know why,” Garcia says with a shrug. “Washington, D.C., is full of politics. My dad was fine with me attending. He’s big on education, too.” Fortunately, his father returned home in December until his next deployment.

Garcia’s respect for his father is so solid you can hear it in his voice. Does he worry about him serving in Afghanistan? Of course, but his dad helps to quell his fears.

“He’s actually one of the few people who will tell me something and I’ll believe him. I don’t care how that sounds. If he tells me, I will believe him,” he repeats.

His father has explained that the news media doesn’t always give the full picture.

“Im news reports, what you see happening are the bad things. You are always going to see the bad things, but it’s not all like that,” the student says. The American soldiers serving in Afghanistan “are trained extremely well. They have extremely good gear. I miss my dad, but I’m used to it.”

Garcia’s parents have instilled in him the importance of education — and a devotion to service as well. A criminal justice student, Garcia hopes to attend the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

“Ever since I was 6 years old, I’ve wanted to be a lawyer,” he says. “I don’t know why. I don’t want to be a regular civilian lawyer. Instead, I’ve decided to become a JAG,” short for judge advocate general.

“I don’t know any other life than the military. I’m just so used to seeing tanks and helicopters and planes and people in BDUs,” or battle dress uniforms, he adds. “So, I’ll live both lives. I’ll be military, but I’ll also be a lawyer.”

For Brian Garcia, adapting to change is just a way of life. Neither a language barrier nor frequent school changes could deter him from becoming a leader.

By Ann P. Schreiber
Garcia sees similarities between the military and SkillsUSA. “You get to meet people from all kinds of places,” he says. “You get to learn a lot, you get to experience a lot, and it’s just a lot of fun.”

How did he get involved in SkillsUSA? “Honestly? I was sitting in criminal justice class one day, and my teacher says, ‘Hey, someone’s going to come and pick you up for something called SkillsUSA.’ I thought that was a bad thing. I thought I scored really low on something,” Garcia chuckles. “Then, I went to the New York fall leadership conference, and I loved it.”

He’s since been elected high school president of SkillsUSA New York. When he told his grandmother, she first thought he’d be running the entire state like a governor. “My family understands that this [SkillsUSA] is going to get me ahead. My grandma thinks it’s the most amazing thing that I’m traveling so much,” he adds.

Born a U.S. citizen, Garcia says his pride in being an American is different from his pride for Puerto Rico but no less meaningful. He frequently visits family on the island, which helps him stay connected to his heritage.

“Because I have experienced what it is like to grow from poverty to how I am now, which is strikingly better, and because of my father’s serving in the Army, I have a respect for the history of this nation and how it has become one of the greatest nations on earth,” he adds.

His older brother serves in the U.S. Air Force and is no longer at home. When their dad is deployed, Garcia serves as an interpreter for his mother — who’s picked up a lot of English “but not enough to have a conversation,” he explains — and looks after his younger brother.

Staying on top of many obligations has contributed to his growth as a leader.

“I believe that a leader must be emotionally able to lead,” he says. “A leader must have character and a purpose. A leader must be able to obey and definitely be able to command.”

“SkillsUSA has taught me a lot about being a leader. I’ve become a better speaker, and I have learned to motivate people. I’ve learned that a good leader knows the difference between leading and dictating.

“And, a good leader knows when it’s time to take control and make a decision,” Garcia adds. “I’ve learned that everyone requires a little help and support from others. I’ve learned that when you are a leader, you have got to have trust in people to do the right thing, and the most important thing I’ve learned is that there is always room for improvement.”

After many upheavals, it sounds like he’s found something to keep him grounded.

“I’ve had fun in places I’ve lived in — and I’ve lived in a lot of places — but nothing’s ever compared to this. There’s everything in SkillsUSA.”

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Mike DeCastro (right) of Air Products worked alongside SkillsUSA Massachusetts members in a state service project benefiting a youth camp. With the help of a Timberland grant and support from Lowe’s and others, the total service engagement was 692 hours.

WEB RESOURCES

- Looking for help from local industry to strengthen your chapter? There are plenty of resources on SkillsUSA’s Web site to help you make a great presentation of your own to prospective local partners, from PowerPoint presentations to partner guides. For more, visit: www.skillsusa.org/supporters/band.shtml.
- For SkillsUSA’s growing list of 2010 official sponsors, visit: www.skillsusa.org/supporters/sponsors.shtml. Keep all of these SkillsUSA partners in mind when deciding what businesses to patronize.

At the Air Products company, countless hours spent with SkillsUSA members are providing a return just as great as the financial bottom line.

When SkillsUSA approaches companies for support, it’s understandable to hear, “What’s in it for us?” When Air Products Inc. considered partnering with SkillsUSA, its staff posed that question, too. But when talking about “us,” these people aren’t referring to their company. They really mean us — as in all of us.

“I don’t mean to sound clichéd, but we really believe in America’s work force and doing all we can to keep it healthy and strong. And for us, that means all disciplines, not just the ones that benefit Air Products,” says Laurie Gostley-Hackett, the company’s community relations and philanthropy manager.

A global supplier of gases and chemicals — serving customers in technology, energy, health care and industrial markets worldwide — Air Products recently ranked 248th on Fortune magazine’s list of the 500 largest U.S. corporations. A business doesn’t scale those heights without planning for the future. So, concerned about the effects of the growing skills shortage, Air Products visited SkillsUSA’s national conference in 2006. That changed everything.

Like her colleagues, Gostley-Hackett remembers being “awed” by the size of the conference, but what affected them the most was a small event held in their honor.
“The moment that really did it,” she remembers, “was when the Massachusetts delegation put on a lunch for us. The officers did a ‘What is SkillsUSA and Why Does It Matter?’ presentation, and we still remember the kids and exactly what they said. They all had the same enthusiasm and passion, and they just embraced those skills that we hold dear at Air Products.

“And all of a sudden, we got it. We knew that this was the organization that we really needed to fully embrace and be involved with at all levels.”

“We don’t have much in terms of operations in Massachusetts,” laughs Mike DeCastro, director of North American gases for Air Products’ global operations division. “But we were so impressed by the delegation that we wanted to do more.”

### A deeper commitment

The experience would come to mirror Air Products’ newfound approach to a SkillsUSA partnership. Yes, the company would make the large-scale, nationally recognized contributions to SkillsUSA projects such as the Professional Development Program and the alumni association. But it would also concentrate its efforts in more subtle ways, through local chapters across the country. And those are the stories Air Products is most proud of.

“In Pennsylvania,” Gostley-Hackett explains, “we sponsor several local competitions and serve as judges. And every June, we host a send-off breakfast for all the students and advisors heading to Kansas City. It’s sort of a rally and a ‘goodbye and good luck from your friends at Air Products.’

“Deeper commitment

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There’s a chapter in Texas at Thurgood Marshall High School [in Missouri City],” she continues, “where not all the students had the red blazer. We provided funding so that every student could compete and look professional in their official attire.”

Gostley-Hackett and DeCastro also “returned the favor” to SkillsUSA Massachusetts, leading workshops and speaking to the students during the state’s 2009 fall leadership conference.

But Gostley-Hackett’s favorite story involves a particularly impressive display of corporate commitment. After all, how often does a business partner actually help start a SkillsUSA chapter?

“The college chapters are so important to us,” she says. “Lee College in Texas is a great example. We have a lot of employees living in the area, so we helped them start a SkillsUSA chapter. We worked with the Texas postsecondary state director, set up an information table in the student union and invited faculty members to go with us to the state conference. It was a great beginning to a successful partnership.

“The big thing for us, and I hope you’re getting this,” she reflects with unmistakable sincerity and enthusiasm, “is that it’s not about money. We’re blessed that we’re able to support financially, but just as important as our big cardboard check is our time. Every hour we spend with an advisor, with a student judging a competition, walking through a lab, looking at curriculum, we’re investing that into tomorrow’s work force.”

The selfless nature of Air Products’ partnership with SkillsUSA is apparent in story after story. (“I have a hundred of them,” Gostley-Hackett says.) And yet, considering that so many of Air Products’ efforts involve students pursuing careers outside of the company’s realm of operations, the question must be asked one more time: What’s in it for them?

“A partnership doesn’t always have to be bottom-line driven,” DeCastro explains. “When you have the chance to make a difference in a student’s life, that’s the return on investment.”
Nick Daddona grew up angry. Though he knew his adoptive parents loved him, Daddona felt rejected by the woman who had given him up for adoption.

“I was born to a Native American Mohawk woman,” he says. Terrified and ashamed to speak to anyone about her pregnancy, she left her reservation for Syracuse, N.Y., and took him to an orphanage, Daddona explains.

Adopted at six months of age, he was raised in south Florida. “My new parents never hid the fact that they could not have children and they needed to adopt,” he says. Both of his sisters have different biological parents and come from different backgrounds. “We were all one family.”

Despite the loving environment, Daddona wasn’t happy. “I grew up with a lot of anger issues and resentment,” he adds. “I always felt, ‘Why was I given up for adoption?’ and wondered if I was unlovable. I knew that I was loved, but I had nagging questions in my heart.”

Daddona embarked on what he describes as a journey of “anger and frustration.” He decided his best bet was to sign up for the military and worry about finding his biological mother later. At age 18, he joined the U.S. Navy.

“I always wanted to be a police officer,” Daddona remembers, “not because I believed in justice, but because I wanted to have authority — and if it meant hurting people, then that was even better.”

However, working in the naval military police was not to be. “The U.S. Navy requires you to be a higher pay grade to take on that job,” he explains. Instead, Daddona was offered a position with naval intelligence, where he thrived.

“I took the test and had a top-secret clearance with the U.S. government. I did that for a time, but found that it was too hectic and not where I wanted to be.”

Daddona transferred to the U.S. Air Force, where he was able to realize his dream of becoming a police officer. “I trained police K-9 units, both dogs and handlers,” he says.
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“Helping others through their pain is a great sense of accomplishment to me.”

—Nick Daddona, pictured with his biological mother, Maryella

Answering the call
It wasn’t long before his anger began to fade away. “I became a Christian during this time,” Daddona says, “and my heart had started to soften and my anger began to dissipate. I no longer wanted to harm people or abuse any authority that I had.”

His change of heart caused him to move in a completely different direction. “I began to study the Bible,” he remembers. “I learned a lot about myself and people. I attended a lot of seminars and took some courses in biblical studies and soon became a minister.”

It was in his congregation that Daddona met the woman who would become his wife. Before long, they were married and began to raise a family.

“We had a daughter, and life seemed to be coming together,” he says. In 1995, Daddona traveled to North Carolina as a youth pastor with the Assemblies of God. Moving his small family over the summer, he faced some surprises.

“The small mountain town we moved to was not ready for a long-haired, tattooed, ear-pierced, street-gang evangelist,” he says. “Quite frankly, I was not a pretty sight. I had to cut my hair and remove the earring and become part of a very laid-back community, something I had never known before.”

Something else he didn’t know was that his calling as a minister would reunite him with his birth family.

A new family and culture
In the spring of 1996, during a pastor’s conference in Atlanta, Daddona met the people who would lead him home.

“On the second day, there was a Mohawk preacher speaking,” he says. “There was a section in the stadium reserved for the tribe.” He told his story to several people, hoping that someone might know his biological mother.

Those conversations helped him find the reservation where his family might be. “I was excited beyond belief,” Daddona says.

He contacted the orphanage in Syracuse, which provided some general information about his birth mother. It was enough for him to begin his search.

Daddona’s wife helped him write a letter that was copied and sent out to everyone in New York state with the same last name as the person on his adoption papers. The letters mailed on a Friday.

“On Monday, I received a phone call from someone who believed that we were related,” Daddona recalls. “He said that he would go speak to the woman he thought was my mother the following day.”

Daddona waited for the news, but the
woman denied she was his mother. It seemed he was back at square one.

The following Sunday, he got a surprising phone call. Thinking it was a telemarketer, Daddona was impatient.

“What do you want, lady?” he asked.

“I’m your mother,” came the response.

“I didn’t know what to say. I began to weep,” he remembers. “We talked for over an hour.”

His birth had been kept a secret after his mother returned to the reservation. She was now married with other grown children and feared how they might react. Eventually, she sat them down and broke the news about their long-lost sibling. More than being shocked, they were excited. They had a new brother.

Daddona visited the family a few times and moved up to New York to the reservation in 1997. “I learned so much about the culture and some of the language,” he says. “I got to meet aunts and cousins and I loved every minute of this homecoming.”

Reconciling with his past helped the pain of his youth to disappear. Now Daddona is doing the same for others — in yet another career. He is enrolled in the massage therapy program at Tennessee Technology Center at Chattanooga.

“That’s why I have chosen the career path of massage therapy,” he explains. “Helping others through their pain is a great sense of accomplishment for me.”

This decision eventually led to his being elected as a SkillsUSA national officer. After being named his school’s outstanding student of the year, he’s in the running for best in the state.

“Wish me luck,” Daddona says as he explores yet another phase of his life.

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Did you know that the students who first established SkillsUSA in 1965 made public relations one of the major goal areas of their program of work? Even then, they understood the importance of making the community aware of the good work SkillsUSA members do.

As a class, split into small groups and brainstorm about stories from your chapter that you think local news media might be interested in covering: a community service event, an individual student success story, anything you find inspiring. Then, come together as a class and pick the top two or three ideas. Elect a PR committee (if you don’t already have one), and have them write press releases and contact local media representatives.

Advisors, for more on this and numerous other topics related to building a thriving chapter, check out SkillsUSA’s newly revised Advisor’s Success Kit (ASK) at: www.skillsusa.org/store/cds.html.

The public is the only critic whose opinion is worth anything at all.
— Mark Twain

Find the photo, win a prize

No, the picture on the left isn’t abstract art. It’s actually a distorted part of another photo in this magazine. Find the original photo and send us the page number where it appears to win a SkillsUSA hoodie (first prize) or ball cap (second prize). To enter, e-mail your answer, name, address and phone number to: anyinfo@skillsusa.org, with “Photo Contest” in the subject line. Or, send to: SkillsUSA Photo Contest, 14001 SkillsUSA Way, Leesburg, VA 20176. One first-place and one second-place winner will be picked from a random drawing of correct entries. Entries must be received by March 15. Congratulations to last issue’s winners: Erin Bressler of Marietta, Ga., and Dorothy McCoy of Woodville, Miss.
Construction students at Sun Prairie (Wis.) High School joined a brigade of volunteers to build a handicap access home for Staff Sgt. Charles Isaacson. The soldier was five days from coming home when his helicopter crashed in southern Afghanistan. Injuries in the crash paralyzed him.

“I was fortunate to have students from Sun Prairie High School come to the building site of my house during the build brigade,” Isaacson explains. “The hard work and dedication of the students was nothing short of spectacular. They helped provide the needed skills and labor that made this project a success. It is great to see young adults such as these taking time out of their day ... lending and learning a valuable trade and skills that will help them out in the future.”

The project was sponsored by Homes for Our Troops, a nonprofit based in Massachusetts.

Electronics students at Hancock High School in Lewisport, Ky., made house calls to install digital-to-analog converter boxes. The Federal Communications Commission’s mandated broadcasting switch confused many viewers who needed the new boxes.

Automotive technology and marine mechanics students at Sarasota (Fla.) County Technical Institute (SCTI) are providing bicycles to disadvantaged youth. When instructor Javier Brito went to a local auto parts company for materials for his class, he discovered a large amount of broken bikes. He spoke to the business owner, Bill Glueck, a program advisor and business representative on the SCTI school advisory committee, and Glueck agreed to donate the bikes and parts to the school. Since then, nearly 60 bikes have been refurbished and taken to a local church to be distributed to children of low income families.
SkillsUSA Champions features our members’ photography. We’re looking for images of SkillsUSA chapters in action, or ones that show individual members’ concentration or perseverance. For details, e-mail thall@skillsusa.org (put “Image Photo” in the subject header) or write SkillsUSA Champions, 14001 SkillsUSA Way, Leesburg, VA 20176. The photographer’s chapter is awarded $150.

I like being a part of a team, and that was something I felt working on the rig. In SkillsUSA, I feel like we’re a team, and I can help be an example for the other members.

Mike Coleman, who was laid off as an oil field worker, became a SkillsUSA chapter president after enrolling at Canadian Valley Technology Center in Chickasha, Okla.
These days, it pays to have someone watching your back. That’s what you’ll get serving part-time in the Air Guard—an entire team of like-minded individuals who want to help you get ahead. In the Air Guard you can develop the high-tech skills you need to compete in today’s world. You can choose from nearly 200 career specialties, with the chance to work on advanced computers, networks and electronics—even state-of-the-art aircraft and satellites. Because you train part-time, you can use your skills to advance in your civilian career. All while receiving a steady paycheck, benefits and tuition assistance. Most importantly, you will experience the satisfaction that comes from serving your community and your country. Talk to a recruiter today, and see how the Air Guard can help you succeed.
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