

# AAMI News

Association for the Advancement of Medical Instrumentation

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## **Employment Focus . . .**

### **Job Security Attracts Growing Number to Biomed Field**

The rumors had been circulating for months. But when the news finally hit, it hit hard.

Michael Gribble and several hundred other employees at an automotive parts plant in Tennessee were called into a meeting and told that they were out of a job. The plant was closing, they were informed, and their jobs would be filled by cheaper laborers in Mexico.

"I really had no idea what I would do to help support the family," recalls Gribble, a 40-year-old married father of two at the time. "The first couple of months were scary because we weren't sure we would be able to make the bills."

Thanks to federal retraining assistance and a program at Cleveland State University, Gribble bounced back and ultimately into a biomedical services job at Blount Memorial Hospital in Tennessee.



Michael Gribble

Gribble is one of a growing number of workers who have entered the biomedical field as a second or third career in recent years, according to educators and employment recruiters.

"The number of older, 'second career' students is definitely increasing. I would say over half of our students are 'second career' students."

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## **The Inside Word**

"I hadn't a clue of the enormity of what was to come. No one did."

David Young,  
Pneumonia Medical

See story  
page 6

## **Relief Efforts Ongoing . . .**

### **Industry Provides Aid to Hurricane-Ravaged Regions**

Some have volunteered their time and money. Others have donated equipment. And still others have created websites to help hospitals find equipment and prepare for future disasters.

Across the country, medical technology professionals—from the largest device manufacturers to individual engineers and technicians—have reached out in recent weeks to provide aid to victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

"We are dedicating every resource available to us to help alleviate the incredible human suffering and begin the recovery



A doctor (left) and nurse from a military medical evacuation team treat a patient at the New Orleans Airport.  
Photo by Win Henderson/FEMA

process," says GE CEO and Chairman Jeff Immelt.

Already GE has committed more than \$10 million in medical devices, power generation equipment, water purification, and other goods and services to the ravaged region; and \$12 million in cash as well as donations that the corporation matched from employees and retirees.

Following Hurricane Katrina, Siemens Medical Solutions provided portable imaging equipment to the Houston Astrodome. Technicians from Siemens then established network connections to several

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# Job Security

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

students," says Roger A. Bowles, associate professor of biomedical equipment technology at Texas State Technical College.

## Switching Fields

Many of these newcomers to the field had been laid-off as engineers and mechanics from industries—such as information technology, telecom, and semiconductor manufacturing.

In North Carolina, "we have seen a big influx of students from the cabling

industry and from manufacturers of fiber optic cable and coax," adds John Noblitt, BMET, program director at Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute.

These second career students have been attracted to the biomedical field by the career security and growth of the healthcare industry. As Lee Propst—one newcomer to the field—notes, "the jobs in the medical industry seem to be the most stable and least susceptible to recessions."

A 39-year-old North Carolina native, Propst began his career in plumbing and heating, ventilation, and air conditioning industries, before becoming a

technician at a company that manufactured optical fiber and cable. He survived several layoffs, but wondered when his "time would come." So in 2002, Propst took voluntary layoff and enrolled at Caldwell.



Lee Propst

"I was attracted to the biomed field because it seemed to be closely related to the skills that I possessed and it would be difficult to outsource the jobs," Propst says. "I had experience repairing complex electro-mechanical equipment and the biomed field seemed to be a natural fit with those skills. Chasing electrons is the same no matter what type of electronic equipment you are working on." Propst now works for Siemens Medical in Cary, NC.

Rick MacDonald of Dallas, TX, experienced a similar career-changing situation, when the Tandy Corp. sold its division in 1994, and thousands of others were laid-off. MacDonald decided to start his own multimedia/software company, which was successful until his customers were hard hit by the .com bust.

"I had to look for a more secure field while I was still young enough to acquire any skills needed," MacDonald says. "I looked at several fields, and because so many technical jobs are being taken off shore including software development and support, biomedical seemed to be one of the few not yet impacted."

Since biomedical had always interested him and he was trained as an electronics technician, MacDonald enrolled into Texas State Technical College. Like others who have switched fields, MacDonald found that his educational background and past job experiences were a perfect fit for a career as a biomedical equipment technician (BMET). In MacDonald's case, he was able to complete his education in a year, since many of his courses that he had previously taken in electronics applied to biomedical. Last month, he began an internship at the Methodist Dallas Medical Center.

Chris Correll's career was also reshaped after he was laid-off from Nortel Networks, where he had installed and commissioned telecommunications equipment. Today, Correll works at Haywood Regional Medical Center in

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North Carolina after earning his AAS degree from Caldwell Community College.

"So far it's been great and I am continuously learning something. It looks like I made an excellent career move at the age of 39," Correll says.

### A Stable Future

While transitions can create anxiety, these newcomers say that the biomedical profession has offered them a chance to work in a growing, rewarding, and exciting field.



Chris Correll

Moreover, Gribble and others note, it's a career that provides job stability at a time when so many other professions lack that benefit.

"I only see the opportunities in biomed expanding in the future," says Gribble. "As the population grows and ages, there will be a need for more workers in all aspects of healthcare. I certainly would recommend biomed as a profession." ■

## Falling Down One Ladder Propels Biomed Up a New Career Ladder

What motivates someone to make a career change? More money? Better benefits? Greater flexibility? Career growth? Advancement potential?

For Wade Whitaker of Indiana, the reason was a tad unusual. Whitaker fell into his new career—literally.

A few years ago, Whitaker was living in Jackson Hole, WY, installing and servicing elaborate, high-end home and business monitoring systems. "I was living in paradise—well compensated and content," he says.

Then one day in Feb. 2003, Whitaker's life took a turn—downward—when he fell off a 20-foot ladder. Injured and unable to work for a few months, Whitaker began to rethink his life and decided to find a job that would keep his feet on the ground.

"I decided to retool my technical skills to allow me to be in a more pleasing environment, yet still work with technology in a field that would keep pace with technological advances," he says. That led Whitaker to healthcare and an educational program at Cincinnati State Technical & Community College that would prepare him for a career in biomedical engineering.

"When all is said and done, I hope to come away with the knowledge to complete the BMET certification as well as a marketable networking certification," says Whitaker, who started his education at Cincinnati State earlier this year. "I strongly feel that combining my current bachelor's degree in business management, the skills and abilities I have developed over the years as a lead IT field technician and the technical skills I am honing at Cincinnati State in the BMET area should give me a definite advantage in the market." ■



Wade Whitaker



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