

## Illinois PE's Firm Seeks to Diversify Talent Pool with Outreach Initiative

NSPE member Sergio Pecori's firm, Hanson Professional Services Inc., is on a mission to provide opportunities to cultivate the next generation of professional engineers through a unique minority outreach program in Springfield, Illinois.

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Hanson partnered with the City of Springfield and Sangamon County to launch a minority participation plan in December. The initiative's goal is to mentor minority students and support their efforts to seek engineering and railroad transportation related degrees and eventually full-time employment in the region. All three sponsors will contribute \$20,000 annually to support the initiative, which will capitalize on existing outreach programs as well as support new ones.

"We are trying to ramp up as many opportunities so these kids can get excited about science, technology, engineering, and math and determine if this is the career path they want to take," says Pecori, who has been with the full-service consulting firm for 40 years.

Over the years, Hanson leadership has focused on diversifying the talent pool through mentoring and internship programs within the firm's 22 offices around the nation. In this latest outreach effort, Hanson will be coordinating with the local school board, educators, and minority-based organizations on a continuous basis to identify high-potential students in middle school and high school for mentoring and internship opportunities. The firm recently hosted a workshop with representatives from organizations that included the Springfield Black

Chamber of Commerce, Frontiers International, the Urban League, local high schools and community colleges, and historically black fraternities and sororities.

Hanson has pledged to hire three minority students for its paid summer internship program. Hanson's program, which typically has 15 students participating, helps students gain professional skills with the potential of future employment with the firm. Kevin Seals, who is coordinating Hanson's public involvement services, believes students will greatly benefit from the real-world hands-on experience they will receive by working on firm projects. "Their participation helps us out, and we help them by furthering their education and job prospects when they get out of college," says Seals, a chief environmental scientist.

The outreach initiative also aims to expose students to careers in the railway transportation industry through the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's NuRail Center, a consortium of partner universities that focuses on railway transportation engineering research. (See more about engineering in the railroad industry on p. 14.)

Hanson, which is involved in the Springfield Rail Improvements Project, will partner with the center on various outreach efforts as part of a grant provided by the Federal

Railroad Administration. The firm will help identify high school students who have an interest and aptitude in railroad engineering for a weeklong summer youth program at Michigan Tech University in Houghton. Participants will receive full scholarships to attend the program. The center will also sponsor workshops and provide scholarships for undergraduate and graduate students as well as supporting faculty members.

The minority participation program goes beyond just helping students.

Hanson will mentor local minority business owners to help them get pre-certified to bid on construction contracts for the Springfield Rail Improvements Project, which can involve excavation, demolition, and landscaping work. The firm has previously assisted minority contractors to become eligible to contract with the Illinois Department of Transportation.

Pecori hopes that the outreach initiative will grow to include other local and regional engineering companies. "We are going to engage other engineering companies in the community to participate with us and see how they can [hire] an intern or [help with] some other type of outreach," he says. "We want this to not just be a Hanson effort, but an engineering society effort."



NSPE MEMBER SERGIO PECORI, P.E., PRESIDENT AND CEO OF HANSON PROFESSIONAL SERVICES INC., IS WORKING ON A MINORITY OUTREACH PROGRAM WITH THE CITY OF SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS, AND SANGAMON COUNTY.