100 CEO Leaders in STEM

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Mary Vermeer Andringa

President and Chief Executive Officer
Vermeer Corporation

Vermeer Corporation is a team of more than 3,000 members, committed to sustainably and efficiently bringing the necessities of life, nourishing a vibrant food supply and effectively managing precious natural resources throughout the world. A family-owned manufacturer of industrial and forage equipment, Vermeer corporate headquarters are located in Pella, Iowa, USA, including offices, production space and Global Pavilion training facilities totaling 1.5 million square feet under roof. The Vermeer footprint also extends throughout the United States and around the world, including Europe, Middle East and Africa, China, Asia Pacific and Latin America. Vermeer supports a broad range of STEM-based initiatives, including internal training, internships and extensive collaboration with area educational organizations. The entire Vermeer organization drives progress and impacts innovation globally, as it conducts business in more than 50 countries with over 120 product models worldwide.

Mary Vermeer Andringa is President and Chief Executive Officer of Vermeer Corporation, a global industrial and forage equipment manufacturer located in Pella, Iowa, USA. Prior to assuming her current role in November of 2009, she was President and Co-CEO for six years. Her earlier roles at Vermeer have included chief operating officer, focusing on her passion for continuous improvement and innovation.

Due to her successful tenure at the family-owned and—managed company, as well as her reputation as an expert ambassador for manufacturing, Ms. Andringa is sought after as a speaker and spokesperson. She was named co-chair of the Governor's STEM Advisory Council in Iowa, effective July 2013, and is past chair of the National Association of Manufacturers, the nation's largest manufacturing association. Ms. Andringa is one of 18 private sector members of President Obama's Export Council, and one of 16 members appointed the U.S. Export-Import Bank's Advisory Committee. She is also one of 12 U.S. members of the U.S.-Brazil CEO Forum, established by the United States and Brazilian governments to strengthen economic and commercial ties between the two countries.

Ms. Andringa credits her background in education for her inherent proficiency at leadership and inspiring team members to reach new heights in their personal and professional development. After receiving her degree from Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, she taught in the Iowa public school system and later in Omaha, Nebraska, for approximately six years. Mary and her husband, Dr. Dale Andringa, have two children and six grandchildren.

Mary Andringa is also involved in the following boards: Member of the Vermeer Board of Directors; Director of the Herman Miller Co., Zeeland, Michigan; Past Chair of the Iowa Association of Business and Industry; Trustee for the Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California; and Trustee Emeritus at Central College.

Why do you believe STEM Education/workforce development are critical to our nation's future?
A successful American economy is dependent on a thriving workforce. During my tenure as chair of the National Association of Manufacturers, we laid out a scenario that will bring our economy, as well as manufacturing, to new levels by the year 2020. That plan is dependent upon creating jobs and building a workforce that meets current and future economic demands. However, it will require a steady stream of talent emerging from our K-12 system interested in and capable of pursuing post-secondary study in STEM so as to enter the STEM workforce. A recent (March 2013) TechNet poll showed that 77 percent of Americans want increased spending in STEM education, acknowledging that we need these skills to be competitive in the global marketplace. As STEM jobs are predicted to grow three times faster than non-STEM jobs during the next decade, investing in STEM education, collaboration and opportunities only makes sense in order to grow and support our nation's economic future.

How has your corporation coordinated investments in education with future workforce needs?
There are several examples, but one of our most recent efforts is a collaboration with Iowa State University. Vermeer has an office presence in the University's Research Park, creating the perfect intersection where we not only engage our future workforce but also have an onsite, student engineering team that works on specialized projects and research. As Vermeer continues to have dozens of job openings at any given time, it's estimated that only 20% of new hires are truly qualified for the job. Building relationships–in ways such as this Research Park collaboration accommodates–bridges the skills gap that we must fill to meet the ever-changing needs of our global base of customers and employees.

What area of STEM are you most passionate about?
I've always been very interested in education, in continuous learning, and as a former teacher, I see the importance of emphasizing all areas of science, technology, engineering and math with our students. I'm particularly conscious of how important it is to make more inroads with younger women in the STEM fields. As an employer, and having been involved in some national groups, workforce development is one of the top issues we deal with. For the last many years, a skilled workforce is always one of the top five issues that manufacturers talk about, and that's often true, not just for manufacturers, but for all business. So we have the opportunity to make sure we've got the right focus in all levels of education–from preschool through graduate school–among females and males alike.

What is the STEM initiative that your company has supported are you most proud?
A program that is unique in our area and has been extremely successful is our Vermeer teacher intern program. While we've aggressively pursued and hosted hundreds of student interns at Vermeer over the years, the teacher intern program is effective in allowing Iowa teachers to experience ways in which STEM skills directly relate to our workforce. Instructors, who receive continuing education credits for participating, are inspired by the ways in which their teaching relates to and provides students with career opportunities. Motivating even a few teachers every year can renew a STEM focus in the classroom and excite hundreds of kids toward creating a stronger and more talented future workforce.

What counsel would you provide around "collaboration to achieve success" in STEM Education and work force?
As I work with Iowa's Lt. Governor on the STEM advisory council, I believe that our state has a great opportunity to make a lot of progress in the STEM area because of the collaborative approach that educators, including K-12, community colleges, independent colleges and universities, have taken toward working with business and government to help Iowa be at the forefront of STEM education. If we continue to build on these collaborative efforts, both in-state and across state lines, sharing best practices and learning from each other, we will achieve success. ■

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