

## SAVANNAH RIVER SITE

# Tech school graduates join SRNS

**T**he Department of Energy announced on January 28 that its primary site contractor, Savannah River Nuclear Solutions (SRNS), has hired, and is now in the process of training, its first class of nuclear production operators in more than 15 years to support existing and new missions at the DOE's Savannah River Site in South Carolina.

According to the DOE, 17 of the 40 trainees are graduates of nuclear technology programs created at nearby Aiken and Augusta Technical Colleges to support the growing need for expertise in nuclear production throughout the region.

"We are pleased that nearly all of these new employees are local," said SRNS training manager Mark Kokovich. "Most have family and roots here in the area. Our company is making a training investment in people who will stay and grow with us as SRNS continues to receive new missions and as we progressively lose employees through retirement."

Kokovich said that nine of the trainees are graduates of the Nuclear Engineering Technology program recently established at Augusta Technical College, and eight are graduates of the Radiation Protection Technology program offered at Aiken Technical College. Both programs were specifically created to provide qualified job candidates for openings at SRS and at commercial power reactors in South Carolina and Georgia.

"The graduates of these programs have gained knowledge and basic fundamentals that will be very helpful toward the successful transition from college to full-time operator," Kokovich said.

SRNS operator trainee Andrew Brown, an Aiken, S.C., resident, said, "I believe the skills and knowledge obtained through the Radiation Protection Technology program at Aiken Tech helped me get this job. I'm married with a four-month-old daughter, so

*Local technical colleges serve as a pipeline for skilled nuclear production operators at the Savannah River Site.*



Photo: DOE

SRNS instructor Skip Johnson (left) explains how a portable air-monitoring unit works to operator trainees Natalie Lee and Andrew Brown.

"I'm very happy to be employed here."

David Deal, department chair for nuclear and skilled trades programs at Aiken Technical College, said, "SRNS and Aiken Technical College have worked together over the years with the mutual goal of providing an education for area residents that equips and enables them to take advantage of the many skilled employment opportunities right here in the community. When so many of our graduates are able to achieve that goal by becoming employees at SRNS, we see our mission being fulfilled. It is a win-win situation for everyone."

Once fully trained, the new class of nu-

clear production operators will be filling roles in operating facilities across the site and at Savannah River National Laboratory.

Kokovich also noted that SRNS plans to hire a class of new operators each year for several years to support growing SRNS programs and to fill the void that is expected to be created in the near future as many SRS employees become eligible for retirement.

"We want to create opportunities for years to come so our highly experienced employees can pass on process knowledge to the new operators, preserving operations-related information that otherwise would be lost," he said.

**NR**