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Engineering program gave them jobs – and love

Richard and Michelle Sweeney will forever remember Focus:HOPE as their “One Stop Shop.” It’s where the Detroit couple found a highly-regarded college education, help finding jobs – and each other.

The engineers met in one of their Center for Advanced Technologies (CAT) classes in 2000 and married about seven months later. They both graduated from the program in May 2006.

The couple was drawn to Focus:HOPE for different reasons. Richard, who originally wanted to be a musician, was urged by his mother to explore the education opportunities at Focus:HOPE. Michelle already knew she wanted to be an engineer, but didn’t have the money to attend college. They both found that the tuition-free engineering program, with classes offered through area universities, was just what they needed.

“The attraction (at Focus:HOPE) was working with my hands,” said Richard, who enjoyed working on manufacturing contracts while studying engineering. Now he is an advanced manufacturing engineer for Ford Motor Co. “But the staying factor was the curriculum. It was a combination of teachers and my peers. We (classmates) pushed each other. Now I’m glad (mom) begged me.”

In the CAT, students receive hands-on work experience while studying toward associate’s degrees from Lawrence Technological University and



Richard and Michelle Sweeney are grateful for the education they received at Focus:HOPE, and for having met each other.

bachelor’s degrees from Wayne State University and University of Detroit Mercy in manufacturing engineering and technology. Prior to enrolling in CAT, students attend the Machinist Training Institute where they learn to operate lathes, mills, grinders and CNC equipment.

During her education, Michelle participated in two externships at General Motors. Now she’s working for GM as a simulation engineer.

All the invaluable opportunities she and her husband have had make her confident they will always do well in the career they’ve chosen.

“I know jobs will be here,” she said. “I’m confident in my abilities to adjust in the outcome of any company. As an engineer, we can go into any field.”