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Through the Looking Glass—Students Envision a Future in STEM

Business Education Compact Directs 17th Annual National Engineers Month

BEAVERTON, OR—STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) professionals from more than 30 Oregon and SW Washington companies will visit hundreds of K-12 classrooms this month. Their mission—build awareness and excitement for a world of careers available to students who excel in math and science.

The urgency couldn't be greater. The United States, long considered a global leader in technological innovation, is facing formidable competition. The key to long-term leadership lies in creating a robust pipeline of future STEM professionals—beginning in the K-12 system.

There's ample reason for concern. *The Nation's Report Card* just released by the National Center for Educational Progress reveals that only 21% of twelfth graders scored proficient or above in science. At the university level, the United States is ranked #52 in quality of math and science instruction by the World Economic Forum.

U.S. global competitiveness demands that we expand and nurture the pipeline of future scientists, engineers and technicians. Important to that priority is changing the image of STEM professionals. Far from being labeled "geeks" or considered oddballs, scientists and engineers are celebrities in many countries. They are honored as society's leaders and innovators. In China, for example, eight of the top nine political posts are held by engineers.

The BEC is doing its part to turn the tide with its National Engineers Month (NEM) program. "When students interact with STEM professionals, they gain a new perspective on math and science," said Tamra Busch-Johnsen, BEC's executive director. "Visits by volunteers during National Engineers Month help them become aware of the many interesting and creative jobs that engineers and technicians do in the real world." She added, "We are enormously pleased that so many professionals are willing to take time out of their busy work days to visit classrooms—they really make a difference!"

Last year, ESI engineer Tim Nuckolls visited his son's middle school, an experience he later described as both humbling and awesome. "I would never have believed that so many excited, creative and motivated young minds could have so much fun and expend so much energy on solving a simple engineering problem for 30 minutes. They were clamoring to share their ideas and literally jumping up and down at their successes."

Newly sworn-in Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber made the declaration of February as National Engineers Month a priority. Since the nonprofit Business Education Compact launched NEM in 1995, volunteer engineers have reached more than 350,000 students across Oregon and SW Washington!

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BEC's NEM 2011 partners are: Acumed; Biotronik, Inc.; Bonneville Power Administration; CH2M Hill; Columbia Sportswear Company; Daimler Trucks North America LLC; Equa-Chlor, Inc.; Electro Scientific Industries, Inc.; ESCO Corporation; Engineering and Technology Industry Council; FEI; FLIR Systems, Inc.; IBM; Intel Corporation; McKinstry; National Energy Technology Laboratory; NuScale Power; Oregon Department of Environmental Quality; Oregon Department of Transportation; Oregon Forest Resources Institute; Oregon Institute of Technology; PacifiCorp; Parsons Corporation; Port of Portland; Portland General Electric; Portland State University; Precision Wire Components; Schnitzer Steel Industries, Inc.; Society for Information Management; TriQuint Semiconductor; Waste Management; Vernier Software & Technology; and Welch Allyn.

For more information about National Engineers Month or to participate in this and other upcoming Business Education Compact events, visit www.becpdx.org.

About the Business Education Compact

For 27 years, the nonprofit BEC has been making learning real by connecting the classroom and workplace through innovative, hands-on experiences. In addition to stimulating interest in science and math for K-12 students through National Engineers Month, the BEC prepares high school and college students for workplace success through in-depth, paid internships. And to ensure that a high school diploma is a meaningful predictor of post-secondary education and work success, the BEC is leading an Oregon statewide initiative to transform K-12 education and dramatically improve student achievement outcomes through proficiency-based teaching and learning.