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By Space Coast Daily // July 30, 2024



While [WorkTexas co-founder](#) Mike Feinberg acknowledges that students looking for a less costly higher education option than a four-year university can potentially attend a community college or trade school, that might not be the solution they're looking for. They may, he says, just end up getting a certificate after a couple of years — which might not lead to a job, which is why WorkTexas focuses on employer-centric training and education.

“A more important question is, of those people who got jobs, a year later, how many are still advancing careers?” he says. “Too many of the schools don't know.”

To provide an affordable way for young people and adults to learn marketable skills that will help them obtain employment in a specific industry, in 2020, Feinberg — whose more than three-decade career has included establishing a Houston college prep middle school that ushered in the creation of similar schools in 21 states — co-founded WorkTexas.

The program helps connect participants with grants and scholarships, so it's generally free; initially, WorkTexas offered residential and commercial electrical, welding, carpentry, general construction, and auto tech instruction.

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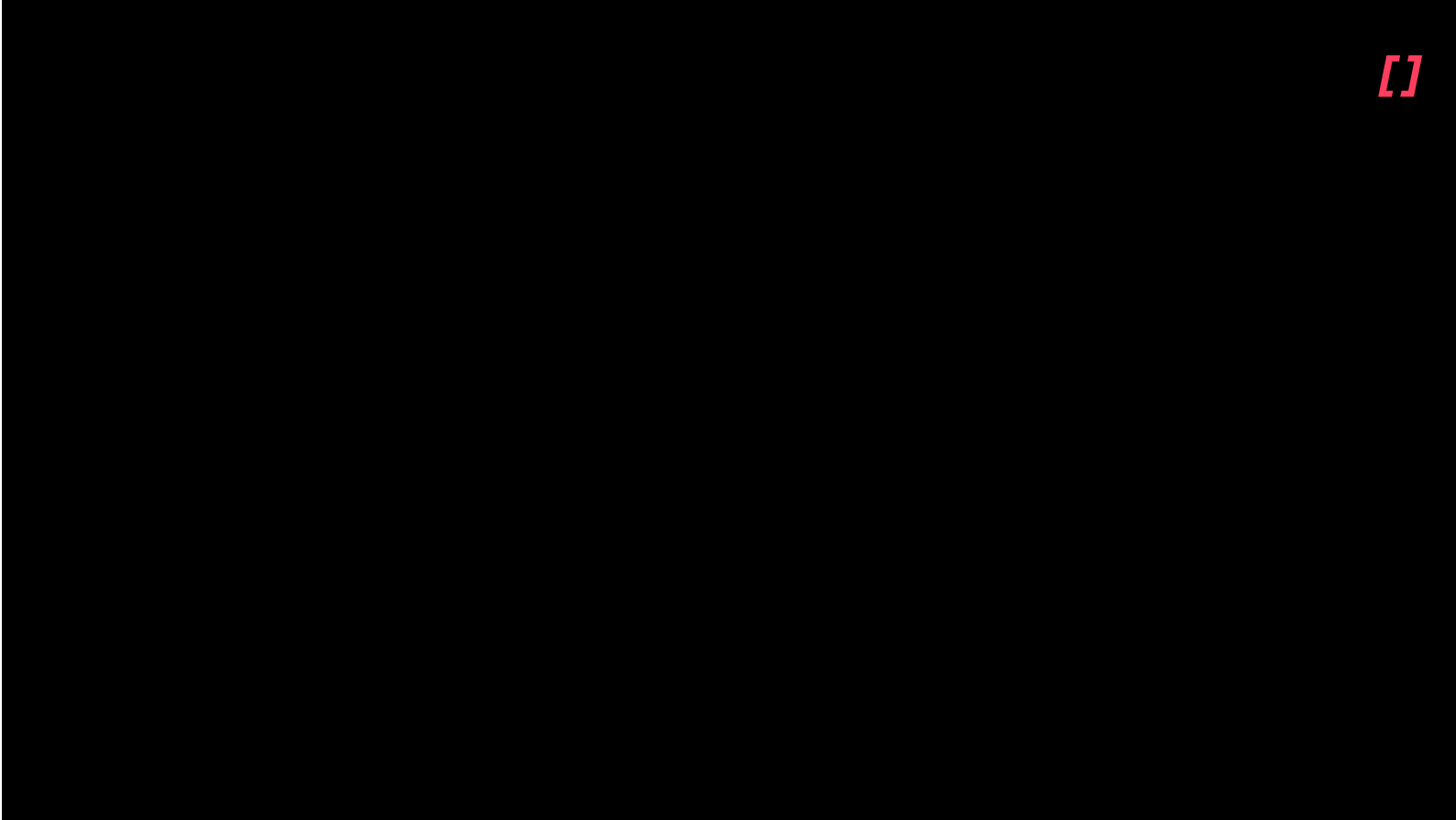


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“We still train in those fields,” Feinberg says. “We’ve since added plumbing, HVAC and building maintenance, [commercial] truck driving, child development associate, medical assistant, [crane and] rigging, [warehousing management], logistics, masonry, and culinary [skills training].”



A Practical Higher Ed Strategy

Headquartered in Houston, WorkTexas operates in two different locations — the flagship store for a local business, Gallery Furniture, and The Opportunity Center, which provides educational services for high school students who have been or are involved in the justice system. The program caters to high school students during the day, who can simultaneously earn a high school degree as they learn about a trade; at night, instruction is offered for adults.

The program curriculum was developed from input businesses in various sectors provided — which [Mike Feinberg](#) feels is the cornerstone of what differentiates WorkTexas from other training-based offerings.


“We are employer-focused,” he says. “Our mission [is] to help people get jobs, keep jobs, [and] advance careers.”

Part of that effort involves imparting critical soft skills that can help participants succeed in the workplace.

“Technical skills are about 30% of what employers want,” Feinberg notes. “The other 70% all say the exact same thing — ‘Yeah, we need more welders who can lay a bead. We need more electricians who can bend conduit. But what we really need [are] people get to work on time; work on a team.’”

WorkTexas’ approach is helping to produce graduates uniquely positioned to fulfill the needs the more than 100 companies involved in the program have. Approximately 70% of the program’s alumni have gotten a new job or better position with their employer because of the training they received, according to the latest WorkTexas data

Feinberg shares how one program trainee, for instance, had an apprenticeship with a large company that builds and manages apartment complexes in multiple states who received its national building maintenance award.



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Anothertraining alumni spoke recently at a WorkTexas graduation ceremony, where she mentioned that after taking the program’s construction class, she’d gotten a job with the homebuilder and within a few months became a project manager for a home — and then was promoted to be the regional manager for a series of homes.

“She went from not knowing how she was going to support her family to making six figures,” Mike Feinberg says. “[She said] ‘Thank you very much, WorkTexas — and students, you should just work hard and follow this [program instruction], too.’ It was a drop-the-mic moment. We keep finding those types of examples, which is really gratifying.”

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