

HVAC Program Returns to Lee College for Fall 2023

Huntsville Center Alumnus Teaches Degree, Certificate Courses at McNair Center



Chris Avirett recalls the very moment he decided it was time to get an education. He was in the middle of serving a 15-year sentence in a Texas prison.

“I was at the T.L. Roach Unit in Childress, and my job was to pick cotton,” he shared. “That’s what motivated me to sign up for school. I knew it had to be better than dragging a six-foot bag behind me — filling it with cotton every day.”

For the next several years until his release in 2001, Avirett immersed himself in as many academic and vocational courses the Lee College Huntsville Center offered. One

course Avirett really connected with was Air Conditioning, Heating and Refrigeration or HVAC, which at the time, was taught at the Hightower Unit by the late instructor Al Davis.

“Al taught me as a young man many things I should have learned from a dad. He said, ‘Look you are going to have competition out there. Don’t lie to homeowners. Just do the right thing.’ He lived what he taught” said Avirett, who has carried on what Davis instilled in him throughout his HVAC career and his personal life.

In the years after his release from prison, Avirett worked for various AC companies as a technician, salesman and accountant and learned how to be a leader without the title, until one day he decided it was time to venture off on his own.

“It was late spring 2005. I gave notice to my employer that I was going to leave. So, I bought a van, company phone and an ad. It was literally one man, one van and one ad,” he said with a chuckle.

Avirett went on to run several successful businesses across the Houston area for 17 years, but in the back of his mind, he knew he would eventually return to Lee College to teach, and for the past couple of years, he’s been working behind the scenes with college administrators to re-launch the [HVAC program at the McNair Center](#).

“Chris contacted us because he had been in the program in Huntsville and had his own company, but he always had the desire to come back and help the institution that helped him,” said Fran Parent, executive director, Industrial and Construction Technologies at Lee College.

Parent has been instrumental in working with Avirett to build a state-of-the-art HVAC lab. Students will learn the theory of refrigeration, principles of electricity, various gas and electrical laws and how to safely use common tools of the trade to evaluate, maintain and repair HVAC equipment. Graduates who receive an associate of applied science (AAS) degree or certificate of completion can enter the workforce as an entry-level service technician, installer and maintenance technician in various industry sectors including residential, commercial, industrial, distribution and manufacturing.

According to the [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), the national job outlook for HVAC mechanics and installers has a 10-year projected growth of 5 percent by 2031, which translates to more than 40,000 openings on average each year. [Texas is one of five states](#) with the highest employment level for HVAC technicians. Commercial and residential building construction is driving that employment growth. In addition, the growing number of high-tech climate control systems is also expected to increase the demand for qualified technicians. Avirett and Parent are providing students with the tools and skills to meet industry needs, but they also want students to have a passion for their chosen field.

“As a technician and business owner, I was committed to serving people, and I don’t think I really knew that at the time, but I did it naturally,” Avirett shared. “I want people to understand the technical aspects of HVAC, but I also want them to understand that they are doing something that’s bigger than fixing an air conditioner. They could be saving someone’s grandmother when it’s 95-degrees outside.”

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Photo: Chris Avirett, a Huntsville Center alumnus, has returned to his alma mater to teach the HVAC degree and certificate course at the Lee College McNair Center.