

GET REAL

CAREER ACADEMY IN GEORGIA USES ADVANCED AV SYSTEMS TO HELP DELIVER REAL WORLD TRAINING AND CONVENTION SERVICES.

By Don Kreski



"We believe kids are simulated to death. There's just not time enough in a 50-minute class period to do anything but talk or watch a video or work on the computer. And so when we began to develop this school, we just kept thinking, we wanted a place where there would be no more simulations."



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AV in Action

That's Principal Cindy Blakley talking about the real-world education offered at Lanier Charter Career Academy (LCCA) in Gainesville, Georgia. Not only is LCCA a high school but it's also a conference center, fine dining restaurant, coffee shop, gift shop, and a producer of custom business apparel.

At LCCA, according to Blakely, young adults can learn interpersonal communication skills applied in a working environment, as well as explore interests in culinary arts, marketing and business management. "There are culinary programs all over this state, but the thing we teach that will make or break a potential employee is how to serve a customer."

To prepare their students for the working world, LCCA developers equipped the school with the latest high-tech systems, ranging from digital signage to high definition video conferencing and meeting recording, all running on a Crestron DigitalMedia™ network.

NOT A VOCATIONAL SCHOOL

Now in its second year of operation, LCCA is a career academy, not a vocational school. That's a crucial distinction in that most of its students are college bound, with a full, traditional academic workload plus career training.

Bussed in from the six other high schools in the Hall County, Georgia public school district, students spend from two to four class periods each day working and learning at LCCA. With classes in culinary arts and marketing, they immediately apply what they learn in practice kitchens, marketing labs or in one of the school's five businesses.

"We wanted to teach contrasting skills, quick serve and fine dining, retail and professional sales," Blakley says. The coffee shop is open from 8:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and serves gourmet coffees, pastries, soups and sandwiches at a walk-up counter and a drive-through. The fine-dining restaurant is always booked to capacity. The conference center features an ABC divisible ballroom that hosts meetings or banquets for 300, plus a private dining /boardroom for up to 12. Like many other conference centers, "The Oaks" at LCCA includes a gift shop, managed and staffed by students during school hours. The fifth business, Design 360 prints t-shirts, embroiders shirts, hats and bags, and

KEY ELEMENTS // FOR THE END USER

ROI:

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LCCA's digital signage system provides event information, welcome signs, menus, and client marketing.



creates signs, banners, and marketing premium items

Though they are open regularly only on school days, Blakley says the LCCA businesses have never refused a customer. "If someone needs more t-shirts than we can handle, our students have to figure out how to subcontract the work. We've had evening business meetings, a wedding reception, and even organized a trip for a senior citizens group. Our students learn to build the cost of personnel into a project to accommodate these requests."

Blakley says, in setting up LCCA, administrators made a big effort to form partnerships within the community. "We have a number of local business owners on our advisory board. We started out by asking them, if there was a meeting center as part of our school, what kind of employees would you like us to prepare to work for you?" Because they began in an atmosphere of trust, Blakley says their business advisors helped with everything from safety and sanitation to the best suppliers for high-tech systems.

EXTRAORDINARY TECHNOLOGY

A program like LCCA's requires much more advanced technology than the typical high school. "We have to have the same kinds of technology as local businesses use, or better," Blakley explains, "so our students can transfer well into the community."

For example, Blakley says a manager from a nearby Marriott advised them on the best

accounting and cash register package to buy, so a client coming in for a conference could charge her meeting expenses, meals and the gifts she might buy for her family on a single credit card slip that would automatically credit each business for their part of the sale.

In the same way, she says they were determined to offer the highest quality AV systems. LCCA worked with a local AV integrator, dB Audio & Video, to make it happen.

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These advanced systems have three key roles in the building.

1. The conference center includes projection, sound, videoconferencing and recording of client meetings to DVD or to a video-on-demand server.
2. A digital signage system provides event information, welcome signs and client



Classrooms all include dual-screen presentation systems plus access to the videoconferencing codecs and digital signage system.



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Major Equipment Used

- *Biamp AudiaFLEX CM
- *Crestron DigitalMedia Systems
- *Crestron DM-MD16X16 and two DM-MD8x8 matrix switchers
- *Crestron TPS-6X touch screen
- *Crestron iLux integrated dimming system
- *Presonus StudioLive mixing board
- *Samsung's MagicInfo software and Samsung flat-panels with built-in signage players
- *Vaddio ProductionVIEW DV Capture interface
- *Vaddio AutoVIEW IR Sensor
- *LifeSize VideoCenter server

marketing messages for the conference center, plus overhead menus for the coffee shop, an outdoor menu for the drive-through window and daily announcements for the students.

3. The classrooms all include dual-screen presentation systems plus access to the video conferencing codecs and digital signage system.

Neil Philpott, systems advisor for dB Audio & Video, says it was crucial to install a digital backbone able to handle all of these technologies and share video and audio signals throughout

at that time, and still feel today, that Crestron DigitalMedia was the only viable choice," Philpott explains.

The DigitalMedia backbone helps make a building-wide video conferencing system viable. The system is based on two LifeSize Room 220 video conferencing codecs, one in the ABC divisible room and one in the private dining room. The dining room includes one LifeSize HD camera and the divisible room one LifeSize HD and one Vaddio PTZ camera. Each room is equipped with a Vaddio AutoVIEW IR Sensor, which allow the cameras to automatically track presenters who may move

recording of meetings or classes, with transfer to one of three DVD recorders or to a LifeSize VideoCenter server. Not only can clients hold videoconferences with their counterparts in other cities, but students can interact with a chef in New York or Paris from either of the two culinary kitchens, or with a guest speaker in the hospitality management or advertising and promotions classrooms.

And because the Crestron system is compliant with all digital and analog standards, staff and clients can use any source to show any media, from older laptops and DVD players to the newest Blu-ray, iPod or iPod Video players, including movies and videos with HDCP copy protection.

The Crestron backbone is also used to support audio and video feeds for the school's extensive digital signage network, which is based on Samsung's MagicInfo™ software and Samsung flat-panels with signage players built in. Blakley says students in the advertising and promotions classroom design all of the images displayed, including signs for client events.

Like any real world business, student event managers must deal with last-minute requests and make sure their team follows through. "They learn quickly that they can't pass off the blame when something goes wrong. A customer doesn't want to hear that someone else messed up his order."

Crestron touch screens and processors simplify operations so students can comfortably control everything. "When we divide the conference

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the building. To do so, he installed a Crestron DM-MD16x16 and two DM-MD8x8 matrix switchers, together with Crestron's 8G DigitalMedia transmitters, receivers, and Category 5e cable.

The DigitalMedia platform allows the transport of all signals at their native resolution without compression, and the DM switcher makes it possible to send any of the video and audio sources to any conference room or classroom. "We felt

around each room. The audio for teleconferences, paging and local meetings is handled by multiple Biamp AudiaFLEX CM processors.

By plugging a portable camera and microphone into the Crestron DM-TX-200 transmitter, the school is able to originate video conferences in any of the classrooms. dB Audio & Video also installed a Vaddio ProductionVIEW DV Capture interface, which allows digital

rooms, the control system knows how the room is divided, and adjusts the sound system and cameras automatically," Philpott explains.

dB Audio and Video also installed a theatrical LED lighting system in the conference center's largest room, based on energy-efficient Elation and American DJ fixtures. In this setup, a Crestron TPS-6X touch screen takes the place

transcends the normal high school experience. "This is about leaning what you love to do and finding out how your skills align—or don't align—with what you thought you might love. It's a place where our students can explore the sweet spot between their passions and their abilities. When they

find it, they can go on to make it happen in college, in a technical school or at work."

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(Clockwise from left) LCCA's convention center venue, meeting room, and restaurant. Digital signage and control technology is present throughout the facility.

of a lighting board, providing a wide variety of effects for client meetings and events, and a Crestron iLux™ integrated dimming system handles house lighting. When more than the typical lectern mic is required, a 16-channel Presonus StudioLive™ mixing board provides professional voice and music mixing.

In describing dB Audio & Video's work at LCCA, Philpott says "Crestron has been a huge asset. We've had a partnership with them for a number of years, and they have always focused on service, helping us with the design and programming of these complex systems."

A TRANSCENDENT EXPERIENCE

Blakley says everything the students do in the LCCA classrooms is directly related to the customers they will serve that week. "They will spend the morning preparing for a group coming in that afternoon. In so doing they learn cooking and marketing skills, but also integrity, professionalism and an understanding of how the businesses relate to one another."

Because everything is based on reality, rather than simulations, Blakley says attending LCCA

