



## Wisconsin Student and Graduate Profile

With more than 20 years in the telecommunications industry, Mark Kools understands the importance of staying current in technology. Mark's employer, Appleton Papers ("Appleton"), had been a Cisco customer for years so Mark was somewhat familiar with Cisco equipment. But as Manager of Telecommunications he wanted to optimize use of the equipment that was already in place, so he enrolled in the Cisco® Networking Academy® at Fox Valley Technical College and earned his Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA®) certification. Mark is now the Director of Information Technology Infrastructure at Appleton. He has been able to directly apply the skills, knowledge and experience he gained through Cisco Networking Academy to successfully fine-tune Appleton's network configurations, increase security, and increase functionality.

When Mark enrolled in the Networking Academy in 2001, he had several reasons. In addition to his desire to enhance his knowledge of networking technologies and Cisco equipment, Mark wanted to gain earn his CCNA certification and help one of his children prepare for college. Mark's oldest son Ryan was a senior in high school at the time and preparing to attend college and major in electrical engineering. Ryan wanted some exposure to networking technologies, so when Mark suggested Cisco networking classes, Ryan agreed, and soon father and son were attending classes together. Mark completed his coursework in 2006 and went on to earn his CCNA certification. By the time Ryan headed off to college, he had finished two-thirds of the curriculum. When asked what it was like going to school with his son, Mark exclaims "It was a lot of fun! We got to spend extra time together, played off each others' strengths, and worked on labs together."

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### **Mark Kools**

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Time management was often an issue when Mark was enrolled in the academy. "You get out of the class what you put into it," he says and "I needed to adjust my lifestyle to ensure I had adequate time to prepare for the class and exams." Working full-time at a job where Cisco equipment was being used while at the same time attending Networking Academy classes and labs at night had a synergistic effect. Mark was able to apply what he learned in the labs to enhance the configuration of the network at work. He was pleased to discover that many of his classmates also worked full-time and brought different strengths and ideas to the academy discussions.

The Networking Academy's online format made it easy for Mark to work at his own pace and as time allowed. "As a working adult, this was very important to my success," affirms Mark. "The hands-on labs were a great way for people to learn things and the instructor, Elizabeth Halweg, was always available to assist as needed and help keep the students focused."

In his position as Director of Information Technology Infrastructure for Appleton Papers, Mark has overall responsibility for the enterprise-wide infrastructure. "The Networking Academy helped solidify my knowledge, enabling me to better develop technology plans to meet our strategic objectives," says Mark.

Mark also has some responsibility for professional development, and believing in the value of the CCNA curriculum, has encouraged his team members to enroll in the Networking Academy. A few of them have followed his advice and are currently taking Networking Academy classes and pursuing CCNA certification. "It will be a boost for the company," says Mark.



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To those who may be interested in the Networking Academy, Mark offers this advice: “It is well worth the investment in time and effort. It is the stepping stone to a career in networking and provides you with a solid understanding of the principles and technologies that support the infrastructure. Get as much knowledge as you can. You can advance your career even more by improving skills and getting additional certifications like CCNP®. The need for IT infrastructure will never diminish. There are great career opportunities. You get to work with new technology and there’s always something new coming out. If you apply yourself, you can really make the equipment dance, and make it a great experience for your customers.”

For information on the Networking Academy at Fox Valley Technical College, go to:

<http://www.fvtc.edu/public/academics/subjectarea.aspx?area=10>



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