

# Palo Verde begins to cement its 'Legacy'

Picture this: You've just graduated from engineering school and landed one of the most rigorous, exacting engineering jobs in the world — working at a nuclear power facility. You show up on your first day, meet your team and get an orientation. Then, you're pretty much on your own to perform. Not an easy transition.

Meanwhile, the nuclear energy industry faces an employment challenge. Students are pursuing fewer science careers and, according to the Nuclear Energy Institute, the nuclear industry's average employee age of 48 is the oldest of any of the country's major industries. At Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station specifically, up to one-third of its more-than 300 engineers are expected to retire within the next 10 to 15 years.

Enter the Palo Verde Legacy Program. Established in 2004, this industry-first program strategically hires engineers based on predicted or actual employment losses, particularly retirement. It systematically develops them to safely operate the nation's largest nuclear facility at the highest industry level.

The first wave of Legacy engineers started the program in 2005 and completed it in January. The program's goal is to hire 15 engineers a year and graduate one class annually.

And its early success already has program organizers looking to expand it in 2008. In addition, Palo Verde management

is looking at putting operators and other key disciplines into a similar program.

"The Legacy Program enables new generations of Palo Verde engineers to continue the learning process rather than re-learn what the current generation already knows," says **Mike Radoccia**, Engineering Team Leader, Legacy Project, and program advisor.

Through a five-part, 18 to 24 month process, Legacy engineers rotate through functional job roles and Palo Verde-specific coursework in the following departments:

- Nuclear Assurance,
- Systems and Maintenance Engineering,
- Design Engineering,
- Nuclear Fuels, and
- Probability Risk Analysis.

Week-to-week, each engineer must complete "learning card" assignments. These range from specific short-term tasks to textbook, industry and regulatory reading assignments. At the end of each department rotation, engineers also must pass an oral board. In addition, they also must pass another rigorous, comprehensive oral exam at the end of the program.

At the conclusion of the program, a cross-functional committee comprised of engineering department leaders helps place each engineer in the position that best matches his or her knowledge and personal preferences with business needs.

"Ultimately, Legacy engineers will have the best of both worlds: First-hand knowledge from our senior engineers and a comprehensive operational view of Palo Verde," Radoccia said.

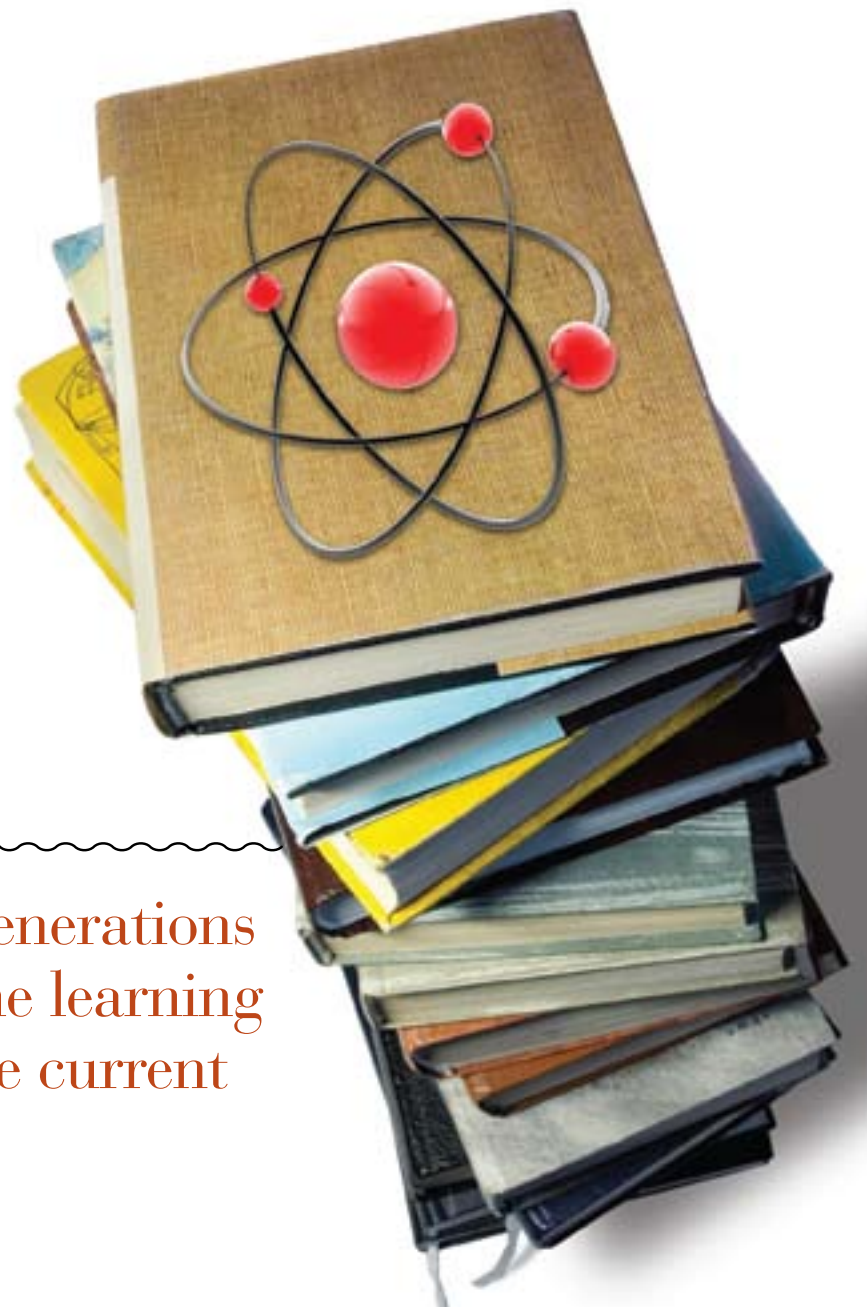
"I can't imagine coming into the nuclear industry without having the type of training that we had with Legacy. If you were just thrown into an engineering position, you definitely would drown," said **Sarah Flowers**, Engineer II, System Engineering Mechanical — Nuclear Steam Supply System. Flowers is a recent graduate of the first Legacy class.

In addition, Flowers said, one beneficial effect of Legacy is the deep camaraderie the participants develop. Instead of one

mentor, each Legacy engineer has a minimum of six mentors — one overall Palo Verde engineering mentor who is with the participant throughout the program and at least one mentor in each functional area. Some participants have up to 20 mentors, not to mention they all have the ability to rely on their classmates, as well. Subsequent classes also look to engineers in the previous classes for guidance and friendship.

"Legacy is creating a peer group," Flowers said. "Our class is really close. But we're also close with the senior engineers involved in the process. It's beneficial to the company and to individual participants."

— Dan Wool



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