

**For Immediate Release**  
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### **Ferris alumni spur donation of International trucks, engines**

BIG RAPIDS – When two alumni of Ferris State University acted on a valuable lesson they learned as undergraduates, the University’s Heavy Equipment Technology (HET) program was the benefactor.

HET recently received four trucks and six engines from International Truck and Engine Corporation of Warrenville, IL. The gift-in-kind donation was spearheaded by alumni and International employees Jim Balkonis and Mike Peters. The trucks are 2000 International High Performance Vehicles (HPV) with fully integrated multi-plex electrical systems.

Balkonis, International’s TEM development manager, is a graduate of the Heavy Equipment Service Technology program and earned his bachelor’s degree in Automotive and Heavy Equipment Management in 2001. HET graduate Peters is a technical service manager for International based in Indianapolis, IN.

While taking classes in the College of Technology, they were educated on the latest equipment in their fields, a hallmark of specialized programs at Ferris. On a visit to campus in 2004, they noticed a need to upgrade some of the equipment in the program.

“We looked at the quality of the equipment and realized that some replacements were called for,” said Balkonis. “To keep an education relevant for students and for graduates to survive in the business world, we knew that Ferris needed to stay abreast of technology and product information. With that in mind, Mike and I started to check around to find trucks and engines that could be donated,” added Balkonis.

He and Peters started making plans with Keith Cripe, Ferris department chair and professor. The project took a little more than a year before the equipment was delivered to the Heavy Equipment Center late last month.

“We were concerned with the quality of the education the heavy equipment students receive at Ferris and the kind of graduates that enter the industry from this program,” said Balkonis. “That was why we were so intent on helping.”

A Chicago native, Balkonis served an internship with International after completing his associate degree. Based on his performance, he was offered a full-time job subsequent to finishing his baccalaureate, a success story repeated often at Ferris.

Peters said he was inspired to arrange the donation because he recalled his Ferris instructors as being highly motivated to see their students succeed. “They were very interested in making sure we received our education and they also helped us find employment,” said Peters. “They had a desire that Jim and I and many others would be able to perform on the job.”

A native of Monroe, Peters graduated from the Heavy Equipment Technology program in 1989. He spent several months with Cummins before joining International where he has worked ever since.

“The timing of this donation was perfect,” said Cripe. “We just had an Advisory Board meeting and part of our discussion involved a curriculum review addressing some of the new advancements in the field that we needed to incorporate. The donation of this equipment will

permit our students to become familiar with these new systems and will put them ahead of the game when they encounter them on the job,” explained Cripe.

**Photo ID:**

**HET RECEIVES EQUIPMENT** – Ferris State University’s Heavy Equipment Technology program recently received four trucks and six engines from International Truck and Engine Corporation of Warrenville, IL. The gift-in-kind donation was spearheaded by alumni and International employees Jim Balkonis and Mike Peters. Pictured are (from left): Ferris Professor Keith Cripe, Balkonis, Ferris Assistant Professor Darren Wilson, Ferris Assistant Professor Gary Maike, Brad Van Camp, International customer service engineer, and Kurt Fracalossi of Tri-County International Trucks in Dearborn.