

# Local opportunities for youth

*County offers students construction-related programs*

BY JODIE GILMORE

For the VBJ

There are several programs in Clark County that focus on bringing quality high school students and recent graduates into the construction industry.

"We need to work hard to change the perceptions of academics," said Katie Insalaco, Deputy Executive Directory at the Oregon Building Congress.

"Construction is not an industry for misfits or losers."

Instead, Insalaco said, employers in the construction industry are looking for highly skilled workers with good math and communication skills and the ability to work on a team.

## CLARK COUNTY SKILLS CENTER

One program is the residential construction program offered through the Clark County Skills Center. Dennis Kampe, director at the CCSC, said that the residential construction program currently has 75 students. Twenty years ago, when the program started, they had only 40 students. It is a two-year program, offered in partnership with Clark College. The first year is spent working on skills; the second year, the students build a house, which they sell to raise money to support the program.

Apparently, the marketing efforts of organizations such as the OBC are working – Kampe stated that a third of the CCSC population is made up of honor roll students, and 10 percent are in the top 5 per-

cent of their class at their home school. High school students who participate in the CCSC program earn credit toward a Clark College degree in construction technology.

In addition to construction skills, the CCSC also focuses heavily on "soft skills." Kampe said that about 15 years ago, employers made it clear that this was a weak area. In response, the CCSC decided to spend 25 percent of the curriculum time on "professionalism": team work, decision making, conflict resolution, communication skills, commitment to quality and work ethics.

• "Employers hire out of the Center just because we

See **OPPORTUNITIES** on pg. 13

have that curriculum," said Kampe.

## **ESD 112**

Another local program is the ESD 112 Youth Workforce Construction Academy, organized in conjunction with the OBC. The Academy is a seven-week paid work experience in which seven students receive hands-on experience in construction trades. Academy students are generally at-risk students, or have some "barrier to success," such as a language barrier, low income and the like.

Students work on public work projects three days a week, and take a field trip on the fourth day to various training centers for roofing, electricians, carpentry and so on. They also receive training in first aid, harassment prevention and leadership development, plus they spend an hour per day in a construction math class.

This summer, the Academy students are building bridges and observation decks at the Columbia Springs Environment Education Center. In fact, over the five years the program has been in effect, students have built much of the CSEEC's infrastructure.

Students who complete the Academy course often move on to applying for an apprenticeship in the construction trades.

"It's good practice for an apprenticeship," said Bryan Grinier, who is part of the Academy this summer and plans to apply for an apprenticeship this fall. "I want to make more money and build better things."

"The kids come out with credentials that will lead them to a career," said Gail Spolar, Public Information Manager at ESD 112. "Professionals that have worked with them are more likely to hire them."

## CLARK COLLEGE

Clark College offers two associate degrees in construction technology: Applied Science and Applied Technology. All the courses are offered in partnership with the CCSC. They cover equipment handling; shop safety; blueprint reading; carpentry; foundation building;

See **OPPORTUNITIES** on pg. **14**

## Opportunities: Clark College welcomes youth into degree programs

*continued from page 13*

codes; estimating and plumbing, heating and electrical basics.

Clark College also partners with the CCSC in the Work-First program, which introduces participants, usually part of the Welfare to Work program, to the construction trades during an 8- to 12-week course. Interested participants often enroll in Clark College's degree program.

Like the CCSC, Clark College makes use of industry advisory

committees and focus groups to tailor its curriculum to what the industry needs.

"We're committed to serving the construction industry," said Lisa Edwards, executive dean of Workforce Development and Continuing Education at Clark College. "We're looking forward to offering whatever training they need."

*See the related story "Building a Better Image" on page 10.*



Photo courtesy of ESD 112

Participants in the ESD 112 Youth Workforce Academy have been building decks and bridges for the Columbia Springs Environment Education Center this summer.