ENERGY KNOWLEDGE POWERS JOBS

Students with special training can find work more efficiently

By PAUL RESTUCCIA

Can knowing how to frame a house with half as much lumber help a vocational student stick out among applicants for a carpenter's job?

Does a student plumber who's helped install a high-efficiency forced hot-air heating system have a pipeline to a position?

Will familiarity with wiring a solar photovoltaic system give an aspiring electrician a direct line to employment?

Paul Wolff is convinced that knowledge of how to build energy-efficient projects will give area voke students a leg up in finding jobs in the trades.

Wolff, in conjunction with his employer, the nonprofit Conservation Services Group, created the Massachusetts Technical School Outreach program last fall to better prepare vocational students for careers in the trades.

The program supplements voke school curriculum with classroom presentations by Wolff at participating schools and hands-on building experience teaching students to install the latest energy-efficient windows, insulation, heating and ventilation systems.

"Today's building industry is changing quickly, and knowing how to employ the latest technology will make students more marketable," said Wolff, 33, who has a master's degree in architecture from the Harvard School of Design.

He says sharing this knowledge with working-class and inner-city voke students will not just help them in their careers, but further the development of energy-saving practices in the trades.

More than 100 area students from 10 Massachusetts vocational schools, including regional vokes in Marlborough, Lawrence, Fitchburg, Franklin and Bourne, recently attended a building trade expo in Worcester. Students took workshops in advanced energy-efficient technologies and retrofitted mock-up walls and attics.

But more importantly, the junior and senior students met with representatives of some 30 Bay

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SEEING IT THROUGH: T.J. Hession and Nicole Moberg are among vocational students building an energy-efficient house, including special windows, yesterday in Framingham.

Knowing energy becomes power in construction

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State builders, giving them a head start on employment prospects.

CSG, a group partially funded by Bay State utility companies that also administers the federal Energy Star Homes program, has also created information boards for each school, with resumes of students who are graduating this year that will help builders find potential employees. CSG itself plans to hire a student intern as a permanent employee.

"We're trying to set an example for builders by hiring a student ourselves," Wolff said. "We're finding as many ways as we can to hook students up with job."

More than 100 builders in the state build Energy Star Homes, with almost 6,500 units built since 1998, all qualifying for utility rebates for incorporating energy efficiency.

Jim Lynch, voke coordinator at the Joseph P. Keefe Technical School in Framingham, agrees that more employers in the trades see knowledge of energy efficiency building as an asset to any job seeker.

"The training and installation experience students get from the Technical School Outreach program is going right on their resumes," said Lynch, noting that 50 percent of Keefe graduates go directly into the work force.

CSG provides the hands-on experience at voke schools' house-building projects. At Keefe, 50 junior and senior carpentry, plumbing and electrical students are building a 1,950-square-foot house in Framingham for a private owner that will feature energy-efficient windows, insulation, ventilation, heating, lighting and fixtures.

Students work on the house five days in alternating weeks on a strict schedule that prepares them for the working world.

"We expect them to show up with their hand tools at 8 a.m. and be ready to work," carpentry teacher Mike Newell said. "The place is run like a real job site."

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FIELD TRIP: Paul Wolff, right, of the nonprofit Conservation Services Group, trains students from Joseph P. Keefe Technical School during the building of a home in Framingham yesterday.

CSG's Wil D'Arrigo is showing carpentry students proper installation of energy-efficient gas-filled windows in the house.

"We're teaching them how to install windows the right way," he said. "Before the students took the workshop, they were doing it wrong."

Wolff uses a fully-framed scale model he built to show students efficient framing techniques — knowledge they put into practice in building the house.

"I plan to get a job doing house framing when I graduate next year," said T.J. Hession, a junior carpentry student at Keefe. "Seeing that model and learning to frame a house with far less lumber will give me a head start when I'm looking for work."