



Conservation Services Group

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STATEWIDE “LEARNING EXCHANGE” HELD TO SHOWCASE GREEN BUILDING TECHNIQUES

Kevin O’Connor of *This Old House*[®] and *Ask This Old House*[®] addresses students

MARLBORO, Mass, April 28, 2006 – More than 120 high school students from ten schools statewide came together today for the “I-SMART Massachusetts Technical School Outreach Learning Exchange,” a day-long, hands-on program showcasing the latest in energy efficient construction. Held in conjunction with the 32nd annual SkillsUSA State Leadership and Skills Conference, the event took place at the Best Western Royal Plaza Hotel in Marlboro, Mass. Kevin O’Connor, the host of PBS’s *This Old House* and *Ask This Old House*, addressed students as the Learning Exchange’s special guest.

The event featured faculty members and student teams from 10 Massachusetts schools participating in hands-on demonstrations, presentations and workshops. The most advanced energy efficient technologies, new products and building science concepts were showcased including structural insulated panels and advanced diagnostic tests. Throughout the morning, students showed O’Connor how to assemble a solar electric system, seal “duct dogs” and build with Lego-like insulating concrete forms. At lunchtime, O’Connor addressed participants. He explained the importance of energy efficient construction and encouraged the kids to keep learning. “All of us at *This Old House* are dedicated to encouraging today’s generation to enter the trades,” said O’Connor. “And, seeing how eager the students are to learn, makes it even more thrilling for me to participate in today’s event.”

Nationally acclaimed industry experts conducted workshops, presentations and served as technical advisors during the event. Teachers from the Greater Lawrence Technical School in Andover and the Tri-County Regional Vocational Technical High School in Franklin received “ENERGY STAR Technical School Achievement” awards. At the conclusion of the event, schools received donated products and materials for participating. Several companies and sponsors provided reference books, CDs, building products and other educational tools valued at \$250,000.

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Each year, the Learning Exchange attracts an increasing number of students and schools. Launched in Rhode Island in 2004, the program is also operating in Massachusetts, Oregon and Vermont. The program was developed by National Grid, Conservation Services Group (CSG) and the ENERGY STAR Homes program.

National Grid has been involved in educating students about energy efficient building since 2000. Jerry Hanna, who oversees the ENERGY STAR Homes program for the utility, said, "The growth of the I-SMART/TSO program over the past few years has been phenomenal. We started with one school in Rhode Island and have now reached thousands of students and teachers at 40 high schools and colleges with the message of energy efficiency. Investing in the professional development of the next generation of builders also impacts the region's economy by providing highly skilled workers to area employers. National Grid is proud to be a part of an initiative that not only helps the students, but also benefits the environment."

Paul Wolff is project manager for CSG's Technical School Outreach program. He said, "Since the Learning Exchange began, we have seen a 100 percent increase in the placement of tech students with ENERGY STAR-rated builders in the region. Students have also gone on to work for energy conservation companies and architectural firms and some have even started their own businesses. The program has given the students solid experience which has translated into many opportunities."

The ENERGY STAR Homes program is a nationally recognized new construction initiative that meets strict criteria set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for maximum energy efficiency. CSG, a non-profit organization based in Westborough, Mass, administers the program and the Learning Exchange in the Northeast.

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Editor's note: for a list of participants, see addendum. Photos are available from L. Rinkus.