



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

WARWICK, R.I., May 22, 2006 – Nearly 200 high school students from 11 schools across Rhode Island came together today for the “I-SMART Rhode Island Technical School Outreach Learning Exchange,” a day-long, hands-on program showcasing the latest in energy efficient construction. Two of the schools, the Cranston Area Career and Tech Center and Smithfield High School, received achievement awards. For the first time, a student from Cranston Voc Tech was given a special award from National Grid. Kevin O’Connor, host of *This Old House* and *Ask This Old House*, was the event’s special guest. The Learning Exchange was held at Viessmann Manufacturing in Warwick.

The event featured faculty members and student teams from 11 Rhode Island schools participating in hands-on demonstrations, presentations and workshops. During the event, nationally acclaimed industry experts conducted workshops and served as technical advisors. The most advanced energy efficient technologies, new products and building science concepts and products were showcased including structural insulated panels, HVAC sealing and advanced diagnostic tests. Throughout the morning, students demonstrated various construction techniques including how to seal “duct dogs,” build with Lego-like insulating concrete forms and install ENERGY STAR[®] windows. During a luncheon at noon, 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. He also told the students, “Keep at it, don’t give up and you’ve made a really good decision.”

After the speeches, teachers from the Cranston Area Career and Tech Center and Smithfield High School, received “ENERGY STAR Technical School Achievement” awards. Serena Benton, a Cranston Student, won the National Grid Technical School Scholarship award for her building

RITSO 2006/2

expertise and academic achievement. A \$1,000 check was presented to Ms. Benton by Robert O'Brien, of National Grid. 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 nearly \$200,000.

Each year, the Learning Exchange attracts an increasing number of students, schools and sponsors. Launched in Woonsocket, R.I. in 2004, the program operates 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 Woonsocket 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 that 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.