

Students to 'Try-a-Trade' Friday at Satsop Development Park

Local News

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SATSOP, Wash. - When you're a high school student, you don't get many opportunities to operate a crane, a forklift or a backhoe. Nor do you often get a chance to "tie" iron, run a lathe, "sweat" a pipe or pave asphalt.

But on Friday, some 600 students from more than 20 high schools in a five-county region will descend upon Satsop Development Park near Elma to do just that and more!

The event, sponsored by the Regional Education and Training Center, (RETC) is the "Try-a-Trade in Construction" annual career fair — a hands-on career fair for the trades.

"This event is a win-win!" said Matt Gordon, event organizer. "It's a win for the schools who want to see bright futures for their students. It's a win for the students who are looking for careers that offer family-wage jobs and opportunities for advancement and

college credit. And, it's a win for the building and construction trades that need solid candidates for apprenticeships."

Busloads of students will arrive at 8:30 a.m. Friday to learn more about a variety of construction trades from painters, ironworkers, electrical workers, cement masons, roofers, sheet metal workers, laborers, plumbers, steamfitters, pipefitters, refrigeration workers, power line clearance workers, sprinkler fitters, operating engineers and many more. The day includes viewing unique displays and ample opportunities to literally "try a trade," with many hands-on experiences.

Students will also have a chance to tour part of the huge BMT-Northwest building, one of the largest steel fabricators on the west coast. They'll have the opportunity to operate some of the overhead cranes, plus see demonstrations of plasma cutting, plate rolling and welding of large structures as employees perform their daily work.



The opportunity for this second annual Try-a-Trade event comes out of a U.S. Department of Labor program that issued 39 grants nationwide to various regions. The Pacific Mountain Region, which includes Lewis, Thurston, Mason, Grays Harbor and Pacific counties, received one of the Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) grants and among other things, created the Regional Education and Training Center in 2008 at Satsop Development Park, explained Cheryl Fambles, WIRED director.

Last year's "Try-a-Trade," which focused on construction technology, was a smashing success, said Gordon, who is on a two-year leave from the Tumwater School District's New Market Skill Center to work as the construction panel coordinator for the RETC.

"One young woman, who had plans to become a cosmetologist, had a turn in the Snell crane," he recalled. "She apparently was an absolute natural. She was able to drop the line and hook into the barrels and place objects where she was instructed. In fact, after a few minutes the crane operator told her that after she graduated she should fill out an apprenticeship application to come work for them," Gordon said.

He said one of the biggest changes in the last few years is that students no longer have to choose between going into the crafts and going to college. "It's no longer college or work," Gordon said. "Now with an apprenticeship you can work your way through college and get paid to learn!"

"Many apprenticeship programs have formed partnerships with various colleges so that after a four- to six-year apprenticeship certain programs are eligible to earn their associate's or bachelor's degree with just a few additional college classes," he explained.



The variety of construction-related jobs is greater than most people know. That’s one of the reasons it’s good to introduce high school students to the options, Gordon said, adding that high school students are often unaware of the many well-paying jobs in the trades.

Gordon said that good math skills are necessary for most all of the building trades. However, he said that he’s seen with many students that once they have an actual, real-life problem to solve, “the light bulb goes off and it becomes easier for them to do it because they have a reason.”

“We love hosting this event,” said Tami Garrow, CEO of Satsop Development Park. “On Try-a-Trade day, the Park is transformed into a giant indoor/outdoor classroom full of big ‘toys’ that students get to test drive. The energy level is high and the campus is full of young people exploring career options. What a great way to match tomorrow’s workforce with those high-wage, high-demand job-training opportunities.

“The building trades are a huge part of our regional economy,” she added. “That’s why it’s so great that the Park’s super-sized infrastructure, classrooms and outdoor training facilities are ideal for this type of job-training opportunity. In fact, we would love to see more real-world training activities at the Park.”



The Regional Education and Training Center (RETC) is a non-profit training organization created by a three-year \$5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. Located at the Satsop Development Park, the RETC provides industry responsive training to promote jobs and economic growth in the Pacific Mountain Region, which includes Grays Harbor, Pacific, Mason, Lewis and Thurston counties.

The RETC offers a variety of programs including job ready OSHA and LNI certifications, NCCCO crane operator certifications, LEED Green Building certificates, management courses for small- and medium-sized firms, as well as providing educational support for K-12 and community college programs in the region. More information on the RETC can be found at www.retc-satsop.org.