



Highway Construction Training Program Offers New Opportunities to L&C Students

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Godfrey, Ill. – The first class of Lewis and Clark’s new Highway Construction Careers Training Program successfully completed this fall, setting a standard for other classes to follow. Currently, the next batch of trainees is being recruited for a 10-week session slated to begin in January.

For some, the program is a chance to start a new career, and for others, it’s a pathway to a more rewarding professional life.

Vickie Harris, 45, of Alton, had no on the job experience outside of housekeeping, but found new opportunities with the Highway Construction Careers Training Program.

“I always wanted to go back to school, but never thought it would be for highway construction,” said the mother of two, who was a housewife for years and now takes care of her grandson. “I wasn’t familiar with any of it (concrete, electrical, etc.), and at one point in time I thought I wouldn’t be able to do this – but I kept with it and learned more and more about all the trades. I actually lit a light bulb and made a doorbell ring, and now I’m thinking about taking more classes.”

The 10-week, intensive training program covers construction math, job readiness, blueprint reading, construction technical skills, first aid, CPR, flagger certification, heavy equipment certification and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) 10-hour certification. It includes classroom learning, skills labs that cover a variety of trades, visits to area apprenticeship programs and actual job site work.

Eric Lambert, 45, of Alton was a commercial driver who wanted to further his education and switch his career path to construction.

“I thought the math classes were outstanding. Especially being my age, it really brought me back to my younger days and gave me a solid understanding of a lot of things that I’m now able to apply on the job,” he said.

Lambert also enjoyed the hands-on aspects of the program, which allowed the trainees to work with unfamiliar tools with real world applications.

“Half of those tools I was unfamiliar with. I also learned a lot of easier ways to do things,” he said.

Lambert is hoping to get into the Laborers, Plumbers or Pipefitters union, and has a personal motivation to continue furthering his education after the program.

Erick Howell, 22, of Jerseyville has been trying to get into a union on his own (preferably Laborers or Ironworkers), and hopes this experience will give him the career boost he needs.

“I’ve done construction, but there were some things I hadn’t done or learned,” he said. “The communications lessons helped me quite a bit, and the math. I have more certifications now and more qualifications to get a good job.”

In addition to career training, the class taught trainees how to be ready for life in the workforce.

“The job readiness class was intense but we learned a lot about ourselves and I enjoyed that because I see myself in a different way now. I learned that you can do anything,” Harris said.

The program targets women, minorities and disadvantaged individuals, and was made possible by a \$239,546 grant from the Illinois Department of Transportation through the Illinois Community College Board. Rep. Dan Beiser, of Alton, sponsored the grant. Successful candidates must be at least 19 years old, have a high school diploma or GED, have a valid Illinois driver’s license, and consent to random drug screening.

“The program is exciting because it allows members of our society to make a difference in their communities as well as their lives,” said Program Director Stephanie Gill.

Of the 30 participants Lewis and Clark can train each year, the goal is to place at least 19 in a union apprenticeship program. Ultimately, the pre-apprenticeship program has a migration path to an Associate in Science degree.

Harris, Lambert and Howell, among others, were honored during an awards ceremony in November for their successful completion of the program. As of late November, the participants were waiting to hear whether they'd been accepted into their chosen unions.

“Members of local unions have been exceptionally cooperative and willing to speak to the class about their specific trade. Most have commented on the positive reception they have received from students. Some students plan on taking college classes if there is a waiting period before they can become apprentices to become even more prepared for this work,” Gill said.

For more information on the Highway Construction Training Program, contact the Adult Education Department at (618) 468-4141.