

Landscape Design class opens Tuesday

BENTON HARBOR — The Opportunity Center in Benton Harbor will hold a six-week Landscape Design class beginning Tuesday.

The class is free, and successful graduates will have a chance to participate in an eight-week paid internship that includes hands-on experience building things like patios, gazebos and sidewalks in and around Benton Harbor.

The curriculum includes the basics of soil, botany and landscape design. Students will learn about plant material and landscape maintenance, laws and safety issues. The class, one of four vocational training programs offered at The Opportunity Center, is taught by Bryce Engle, a certified master gardener with 35 years of experience. Engle said there is a large creative element to learning the craft of landscape design, and landscaping is much more than lawn-mowing.

Todd Gustafson, executive director of Michigan Works! Berrien, Cass, Van Buren, said labor market research projects a 22.1 percent increase in landscaping and groundskeeping jobs through 2012 in the tri-county area.

In a news release about the class, Gustafson said, "Local employers throughout Southwest Michigan will need trained, qualified workers to help their businesses grow. We hope to create a pipeline of workers for this industry through this vocational training."

Candice Elders, director of community relations at Michigan Works!, said there is a wide variety of entry-level to professional jobs within the industry. Graduates can work in local greenhouses or retail nurseries, she said. Other jobs are available in pesticide application or turf management at schools or golf course. Elders said some of the graduates choose to further their training with a two-year certificate or bachelor's degree in landscape architecture.

Anyone interested in taking the next landscape class should apply at The Opportunity Center, 960 Agard, Suite 180, Benton Harbor. Call 926-2430 for more information.