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SEARCH ARCHIVES

Scholarship focuses on jobs in green building

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By **JESSICA SIEFF**
Niles Daily Star

For some time now, the term “LEED” was the word on the street.

For those who may not be up to speed on the eco-conscious green building speak, LEED as defined by the United States Green Building Council is “an internationally recognized green building certification system, providing third-party verification that a building or community was designed and built using strategies aimed at improving performance across all the metrics that matter most: energy savings, water efficiency, CO2 emissions reduction, improved indoor environmental quality, and stewardship of resources and sensitivity to their impacts.”

It is just one of the many measures being taken to not only develop more environmentally beneficial practices in a variety of industries while in some cases creating new jobs.

Along those lines, Michigan Works recently announced it would be offering 15 new scholarships “to train individuals with the skills and certification needed to succeed in energy conservation-related construction apprenticeships.”

The specialized program will be administered through Lake Michigan College.

As many of the area’s unemployed continue to look for jobs, the program is hoping to help their chances “by preparing

them with the skills relevant to employers in the construction industry.”

“What we find is that most of the new construction practices and techniques are green construction,” said Candice Elders, of Michigan Works of Berrien, Cass and Van Buren.

“Recent studies have projected an influx of career opportunities in this industry,” added Todd Gustafson, executive director of Michigan Works. “It’s important that our local workforce has the cutting-edge skills to keep up with industry trends.”

The Berrien, Cass and Van Buren organization recently put out its annual career guide list and “Hot Tri-County Jobs.”

Throughout each description and assessment of where the opportunity for jobs exists – though its not certain whether the area will see an increase in unemployed workers heading back to workforce – what is certain is the emphasis being put on training and the need for secondary education.

In the world of green building, according to the organization’s announcement, “a recent study by the Pew Charitable Trusts found that jobs in the clean energy economy grew nearly two and a half times faster than overall jobs between 1998 and 2007. Michigan’s Green Jobs Report found that Michigan businesses have already created at least 109,000 private sector green jobs; Michigan’s green companies have expanded their employment by 7.7 percent; and companies that produce renewable energy have grown by 30 percent.”

Those interest in applying for one of the available scholarships, must at least age 18 and carry a high school diploma or equivalent. A valid driver’s license will also be required and applicants will have to pass a drug test, pass a basic skills test and meet income eligibility guidelines.

At the Benton Harbor Michigan Works office, 499 W. Main Street, four two-hour information sessions will be held today and Wednesday at 9:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m., and 3 p.m. Monday and at 5 p.m. Wednesday. You must attend one session to receive a scholarship.

“We are seeing a general projected shortage in these types of skills,” Elders said. The program is described as “intensive” and will last nine weeks at Lake Michigan College’s M-TEC campus.

The program is scheduled to start in January 2010. A total of 19 curriculum components will be taught to students, “including principles of green construction, applied math, blueprint reading, applied computing and workplace safety. Graduates will earn several certifications including MIOSHA, First Aid, Green Awareness Certification, and a National Career Readiness Certificate.”

“By once again partnering with Michigan Works!, we are able to provide local residents with training that can make them more marketable in a competitive job arena that is increasingly requiring workers to be prepared with new skills,” LMC President Robert Harrison said. “This program is another important element in the career training we are providing that will help our region be ready when the economy improves.”

Those who receive the scholarships will have free tuition, materials and books and even \$10 stipend.

“This stipend allows adult students to receive an education while still making ends meet,” Gustafson explained.

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