



## ACE frames training in trade industries

*New school teaches soft skills to hard hats*

BY ROB CULLIVAN

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**Michael Taylor, director of the newly opened Architecture, Construction & Engineering, or ACE, Academy in northeast Portland knows exactly what his students want.**

“For me to explain to you how to build a high-rise won’t make sense to you, but I can show you in 10 minutes,” he says.

The school is designed for the type of student who thrives in a hands-on learning environment, he adds, noting the 144 high school seniors and juniors won’t just be sitting in classrooms but will be taking several field trips to work sites in the Portland metro area.

Centennial, Gresham-Barlow, Parkrose, Sandy and Reynolds school districts are operating ACE in partnership with the Oregon Building Congress. Students attending ACE will split their time between ACE and their home high schools. The new students range from some who already have worked at the entry level in their chosen field to those “who have never seen a hammer or screwdriver,” Taylor says.

He notes that ACE is designed to offer students a chance at skilled trades apprenticeships in the carpentry, electrical and sheet metal industries as well as earn credits that can be used at colleges offering construction, architecture and engineering degrees.

Both Taylor and Karen Natzel, the school’s marketing coordinator, say ACE will help fill a vital need for trained workers. For example, Taylor says many people enter the skilled trades in their late 20s and have to relearn such subjects as math. In addition to teaching students the nuts and bolts of trade industries, ACE offers classes in math, English and science.

Taylor notes that ACE also will teach the students “soft skills,” such as getting to work on time, staying on task and communicating with folks who work in other fields and with clients.

On that note, Natzel says, architects, construction workers, engineers and electricians all must be able to talk outside their respective boxes.

“There’s big cost issues if they don’t coordinate well,” she says.

John Steffens, vice president of the Oregon Building Congress, echoes those points.

“I think (ACE students) will be far more prepared than folks walking off the streets because they’ll have these skill sets,” Steffens adds. “They’ll be more accountable and dependable.”

Randy Scott, ACE’s engineering resource teacher, says he is looking forward to working with his new students at the school.

“I think it’s definitely a very innovative idea with a lot of potential, and I’m really excited to get it off the ground and finally meet the students,” he says.

And in a global economy, ACE offers young people something a lot of other industries and fields don’t these days, Taylor says – a decent shot at long-term job security.



JIM CLARK / GRESHAM OUTLOOK  
ACE Academy students try out their new computers on the first day of class under the watchful eye of their English teacher Erin Butler, right, in red pants.

**“It’s difficult to outsource putting up a building,” he says.**

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