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Trade professionals, Windham partner to improve career training

By Carmen Villanueva-Hiles, Member

In order to provide the best possible career-training programs for offenders, the Windham School District (WSD) Career and Technical Education (CTE) department works with private companies and trade organizations to establish important contacts with the state's job-providing industries. These partnerships provide CTE instructors an opportunity to visit with business professionals in their specific trade areas, obtain feedback on their vocational curriculum and learn about new industry trends. They also help WSD identify jobs which are available to offenders, and how to best prepare them for employment in these trades.

The first CTE statewide conference was held in Palestine, attended by WSD instructors from the mill and cabinetmaking, construction carpentry, painting and decorating, and bricklaying/stone masonry classes. Terry Manufacturing Corporation allowed instructors to observe recent technical advancements in the construction field and other new developments were discussed.

Subsequent conferences allowed Houston-based Johnstone Heating and Air-Conditioning to provide WSD heating and air-conditioning instructors with training on psychometrics and airflow dynamics, leading to the development of three new curriculum modules to better prepare ex-offenders for work in the field. Welding, plumbing/piping trades and sheet metal instructors attended a conference with Rentech Inc. of Abilene, where they were encouraged to offer non-traditional trades, such as welding, to female offenders. A tour of the Rentech facility demonstrated real-world employment opportunities, resulting in upgrades to the WSD sheet metal and welding programs.

Trio Electric Company met with electrical trades and plant maintenance instructors at the Gulf Coast Independent Electrical Contractors Association in Houston, where two former WSD students currently teach apprenticeship programs. Instructors compared the technology and apprenticeship lab to technology currently available in the WSD

shops. As a result of Trio Electric's encouragement to provide alternative training for females, an electrical trades program has been established at the Woodman State Jail. Auto specialization, small engine repair and diesel mechanics instructors visited the Toyota plant in San Antonio and met with factory workers who shared their work experiences, improving instructors' knowledge of career possibilities available to Windham students after release. Horticulture and landscape design construction maintenance instructors visited Landmark Nurseries and Greener Pastures in Fort Worth. Innovations in multimedia education were examined and discussed, leading to technical improvement in WSD classrooms.

Melange Catering of Houston, which employs ex-offenders, hosted instructors in culinary arts, diversified career preparation, and personal and family development programs. A facility tour was followed by an evening spent cooking and preparing dishes with the catering company's chefs, giving in-

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structors valuable insight regarding preparing their students for success in the culinary field. It also revealed the need for a CTE class in restaurant management, which has been implemented for the 2012-2013 school year.

New Horizons, another Houston company, provided advanced Microsoft Access and Excel training to business computer information systems instructors, and advanced InDesign graphics training to the business image management and multimedia instructors. Instructors collaborated to develop a new curriculum enrichment module which includes portfolio development and job search skills.

Hillyard Cleaning at Abilene Christian University met with custodial maintenance technician instructors to review new industrial technology and how to properly use biodegradable and green technology chemicals in the workplace. Also in Abilene, computer-aided drafting instructors visited Cadco Drafting Corporation where they examined how WSD uses software in regards to real-life applications and took a tour of the architectural drafting facility.

The Manufacturing and Logistics Division's Computer Recovery Operations center hosted computer maintenance technician instructors at the Wynne Unit in Huntsville, where they learned about on-the-job training opportunities for their students and alternative industry certification program for offenders available through the Electronic Technician's Association.

These collaborative efforts between the agency's CTE instructors and private-industry trade professionals enhance offender career training and improve their chances for successful reentry into society. Working in cooperation with private industry, Windham's career-training programs are teaching important job skills that are current for today's market and will help offenders find quality employment after their release. ●