

CEFGA | BUILD

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Rodney Williams described his six months of unemployment as an “emotional roller coaster” ride. Williams recently stepped off that roller coaster and into employment, thanks to a new program in East Georgia.



CEFGA, Partners Putting People Back to Work in East Georgia

By Stephanie DiLorio

For Grovetown resident Rodney Williams, April 22, 2010 marked the end of six months of unemployment, which he describes as an “emotional roller coaster” ride. On that unusually hot spring afternoon, friends and family joined Mr. Williams and his six classmates to celebrate their recent employment and graduation from East Central Georgia Consortium’s (ECGC) Energy and Industrial Construction Program.

Just weeks before graduation, this inaugural class of men and women had been hired by Shaw Power to work on the expansion of Plant Vogtle, Georgia’s nuclear

facility in Burke County. “When I told the class that each of them had been invited to an interview with Shaw, I heard a collective sigh of relief,” remembers program instructor John Ambrosia of HB Training & Consulting (HBTC).

In 2009 when plans were announced to expand the plant, the Construction Education Foundation of Georgia (CEFGA) and the Georgia Energy and Industrial Construction Consortium (GEICC) recognized the chance for collaboration among key stakeholders in the East Central Georgia economy and connected ECGC and Shaw

Power. “We saw a clear opportunity for a win-win for the community and Shaw, and wanted to do our part to facilitate collaboration,” said CEFGA Executive Director Scott Shelar.

ECGC was focused on tackling high unemployment levels in the region and at the same time addressing workforce development in construction. Shaw Power was interested in hiring locally for its projects in the area. With complementary goals, ECGC and Shaw Power began to discuss in detail requirements and skills necessary for construction workers to be competitive.

Shaw Power Workforce Development Manager Jack Williams says, “We want to be an employer of choice and a good citizen of East Central Georgia. One of the ways we are trying to do this is by matching local people with opportunities.”

Through many discussions, it became clear to ECGC Director Joyce Blevins that a standards-based construction training program was the key to developing a pipeline of talent prepared to rapidly adjust to industry needs. Because NCCER certification and OSHA training are currently used as hiring requirements by Shaw Power and quickly becoming industry standard, ECGC partnered with HBTC to develop a program that provides these credentials to participants.

Funded by a Georgia Work Ready grant and delivered by HBTC, the Energy and Industrial Construction Program offers participants approximately 160 hours of training on safety, NCCER core construction curriculum, craft training, and soft skills, including interpersonal communication, interviewing, and resume writing. “This program gives construction companies good value,” said HBTC president Mark Hornbuckle. “When a company hires someone from the program they know they are getting someone who wants to work. Someone who has received safety and craft training—an NCCER credentialed person.”

In his remarks at the graduation ceremony, Shaw Workforce Development Manager Jack Williams said, “Shaw wants to be an employer of choice and a good citizen of the communities where our projects are located. One of the ways we try to be a good citizen is to identify local resources and match them with opportunities. We could not have done this without CEFGA and GEICC. Today is a perfect example of what we are trying to do.”

“We are very excited about the program because there is so much construction in the area,” says ECGC Director Joyce Blevins. “In addition to the thousands of jobs coming up at Plant Vogtle, we expect to see more projects at Fort Gordon and the Medical College of Georgia.” For people out of work, the prospect of steady demand is welcome news.

Each person in the inaugural class took a different route to find his or her way to



After working as a translator in the Air Force, Jonathan Tankersley knew he did not want an office job. Although he had no experience in construction, he believed the new ECGC Energy and Industrial Construction Program would provide good opportunity. He was right.

the One Stop Center in Thomson and passed entrance tests to be accepted into the program. They all had very different backgrounds and stories, but shared motivation to create a better, stable future. Mr. Williams, for example, had thirty years of experience as a tool and die maker, but was prepared to re-train to improve his job prospects. He inquired about taking classes at Augusta Technical College and was encouraged to join the ECGC Energy and Industrial Construction Program to re-train in construction quickly.

In contrast, 26-year-old Jonathan Tankersley, who completed his service in the Air Force in January 2009, heard about the program through a friend. Once stationed at Fort Gordon, he decided to return to Georgia and start civilian life in Grovetown. He knew he didn’t want an office job after working as a translator in the Air Force. Although he had no experience in construction, he was interested in carpentry and felt the Energy and Industrial Construction Program provided a good opportunity for skills development.

Upon completing the program, which includes approximately 160 hours of training on safety, core construction principles, specific crafts, and soft skills, Mr. Rodney Williams and Mr. Tankersley along with the rest of their class received NCCER certification, an OSHA 10 card,

and recognition for their hard work and commitment to themselves and their families.

Hosted by ECGC and HBTC, the ceremony drew representatives from CEFGA, Shaw Power, and the Department of Labor. During remarks at the ceremony Ms. Blevins pointed out how this program impacts the larger community. “For each person hired, we know a family has an income,” she said. Mr. Jack Williams lauded the collaboration among stakeholders. He gave credit to CEFGA for facilitating the process, which he describes “as the perfect example” of how Shaw Power can be a good citizen of the communities in which it works.

At the reception following, Mr. Rodney Williams said “happy” was the best word to describe how he felt. Having been on the emotional roller coaster for six months, he was glad to be standing on solid ground. With ECGC’s new program in place, this too will be possible for many others.

For more information, contact CEFGA at 678-889-4445 or info@cefga.org