

YOUTH CONSTRUCTION PROGRAM

By MOLLY HARDING

Garrison Electric in Ridgeville has a new apprentice, thanks to the Niagara Youth Construction Labourer Program run by the District School Board of Niagara in 2006. The six-month training program ran from April to October last year and plans are pending to run another program with funding approval from Service Canada.

The hands-on program targeted youth from 16 to 30 years old, with barriers to employment, says Carol Maingot, co-ordinator of the community education services department of the District School Board of Niagara. These barriers included no high school diploma, no ongoing attachment to the workforce and/or no readily marketable skills.

Pre-employment training included skills training in framing, drywall, finishing, trim carpentry, electricity and plumbing, with the added bonus of resume writing, interview conduct, employer expectations and interpersonal skills, as well as general English literacy upgrading.

Ten participants were graduated from the program and a number of them were immediately offered employment in the construction field. One participant, Adam Moreau, was offered an electrical apprenticeship with his work experience host, Garrison Electric. He may soon also qualify for a \$1,000 scholarship under the Ontario government's new apprenticeship incentive plan. This requires the apprentice to complete his or her high school education. Moreau is completing his final high school credit, on a self-study basis.

His employer may also qualify for a \$2,000 signing bonus and apprenticeship tax credit.



Matthew Oussoren, left, owner/operator of Garrison Electric, with Adam Moreau, the company's newest apprentice and graduate of the Niagara Youth Construction Labourer Program

Another successful outcome of the program was for the only female in the class. Mary Shute, a single mom, was offered a full time position with Elmwood Kitchens in St. Catharines.

In spite of her home responsibilities, which included an extended day of dropping off and picking up her daughter at day care, she never missed a day of class and was a positive role model for other participants, says Maingot.

"We are hoping to have more girls and women in the next program, as the avenues for work are equally applicable to females."

Though the program was presented by the District School Board of Niagara, its success is very much at the door of the partners in this venture, Maingot points out.

They included Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (now renamed Service Canada); the regional Job Connect programs through Niagara College; Job Gyms

in Welland and St. Catharines; the Niagara Catholic District School Board; Ontario Works and local employers in the construction sector.

Stepping up to the plate here were members of the Niagara Home Builders' Association, the Niagara Construction Association and various retail establishments which helped provide building materials required by the program.

The training was conducted at Lakeport Secondary School and the Lifetime Learning Centre in St. Catharines. Instructional staff were Mike Hauer, a high school construction technology teacher, Sterling Harvey, an employability instructor, and Bob Gibson, a literacy instructor. The extensive experience of these people was invaluable in the program, Maingot says.

The program was developed by an advisory committee of Work in Niagara - Construction Sector. Its purpose was to equip youth for an entry-level job, an apprenticeship or post-secondary program in the construction industry.

Maingot says the program was not only beneficial to the young people participating, but contributes to the economic development of Niagara, where there is a considerable shortage of skilled tradespeople and may be an even greater shortage in the future. Strong efforts are being made to improve the supply of workers in the skilled trades, she says, and programs such as these are an integral part of that effort.

Such programs also help alleviate the relatively high unemployment rate for youth in Niagara.