

Transportation Agency Builds Diverse Workforce



Lori Bean of Worksystems, Inc. lends her expertise to potential apprentices entering careers in heavy highway construction.

Minorities, women wanted for highway projects

The Portland Metro Area Regional Workforce Alliance is preparing 31 potential apprentices for entering careers in heavy highway construction.

The Oregon Department of Transportation collaborated with the Oregon Employment Department, Bureau of Labor and Industries, and WorkSystems, Inc. to develop orientation classes to help

candidates meet apprenticeship requirements to enter into the heavy highway construction labor pool.

Those requirements include academic and skills testing, registration in a job database, and viewing an ODOT-produced video designed to prepare people for a career in highway construction.

The orientations are part of the agency's goal of expanding the

number of qualified people—especially women and minorities—working on highway projects.

Skilled highway construction workers are in demand in the Portland metro area and across the state as ODOT repairs and replaces hundreds of bridges through the \$1.3 billion State Bridge Delivery program.

“Forty percent of skilled construction workers in the Portland metro area are 45 years old or older,” said Guy Crawford, director of employment services for Northwest College of Construction. “Projects like the bridge program, Portland’s downtown transit mall renovation and the Portland Development Commission’s south waterfront development projects make this an opportune time to enter the construction industry.”

The orientations, held at the Metro One Stop Center of the Portland Community College Workforce Network in northeast Portland are the first of many similar sessions scheduled around the state during the coming year.

Heidi Moon, a civil engineering student at PCC, attended the orientation to find out more about an apprenticeship as an operating engineer. Moon learned about the apprenticeship program on ODOT’s web site and came to the orientation to hear from experts in the construction industry.

“I have a family, and I’m looking for a way to make a good living without completing a four-year degree,” said Moon. “It was great to hear from other people in the industry, and I’m excited to see where this takes me.”

Apprenticeships in heavy highway construction trades such as ironworking, carpentry and equipment operation provide occupational training that combines on-the-job experience with classroom instruction. Students can also apply these credits toward an associ-

ate degree. Typically, these paid apprenticeships last two to five years and allow people to earn a livable wage while they learn.

“Apprenticeships start at approximately \$16 per hour, or 60 percent of what a certified journey worker makes, and we’ll prepare you to manage your money,” said David Dixon of ODOT’s Office of Civil Rights. “If you look at this as a career, the opportunities for financial and professional growth are limitless.”

Paul DePalma, ODOT Region 1 Technical Center manager, assured

the group that current and future bridge program projects and other public and privately funded projects across the state would result in increased job opportunities.

“As we look ahead, there is a serious shortfall in the number of construction workers in the state,” said DePalma. “We are looking to you to take this opportunity to develop a rewarding career and build Oregon’s transportation infrastructure. You have an opportunity to invest in your future and the future of our state.”



Tamera Boyd of the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries works to expand the number of women and minorities working on highway projects.