

#318

Okanagan Valley TV Guide inside today's paper



Crocodile
writer's widow
ries on
vision - B6

Geroy Simon,
B.C. Lions
roar into CFL
post-season - B1



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OKANAGAN COLLEGE CAREER FAIR

Other trades suffer as students go for carpentry

By DON PLANT
The Daily Courier

The construction boom is attracting young people at the expense of other trades, says Chris Burns.

The chair of the collision-repair department at Okanagan College had to cancel a full class this year because enrolment is about half what it should be, he said Sunday at the college's career fair.

"A lot of people who would come in (to collision repair) are being lured away to the construction fields. There are lucrative, entry-level jobs," Burns said.

"One young fellow who signed up for our nine-month program talked to a friend who said, 'Why go to school for nine months? I could pay you now what you'd earn when (you graduate), hauling two-by-fours.'"

Down the hall at the carpentry department, entry-level students were busy building beach chairs and step stools Sunday. Enrolment in the six-week apprenticeship program has more than doubled to 95 students in the last eight years, said instructor Marvin Rode.

"There are lots of jobs. These guys can't wait to get out of here because their employers are afraid to let them go. Six weeks is a long time to be without an extra pair of hands," he said.

Demand is equally high for other trades like automotive mechanics, cooks and recreational-vehicle mechanics, said Burns. But it's hard to compete because construction jobs in the Okanagan are so plentiful, he said. Collision-repair shops from across B.C. are "begging" for qualified tradesmen.

Continued on page A3



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