



Walter Gerzen attaches a piece of siding onto the Okanagan College Learning house on Karlstrom Place in Summerland. Gerzen is one of 11 students earning their first level carpentry apprenticeship through the college's residential construction program. Another 18 students are working on their electrical apprenticeships.

SCOTT TRUDEAU/Penticon Herald

# Getting a jump on careers

**Apprentices are getting hands-on experience through Okanagan College's home-building projects**

By SCOTT TRUDEAU  
Penticon Herald

**W**hen the current Okanagan College Home for Learning project wraps up, part of the proceeds from the sale of the house will go towards training for students like Walter Gerzen.

Not only is Gerzen on the verge of completing the first of four levels of a carpentry apprenticeship, but he's also earning credits for his upcoming

graduation when he starts Grade 12 at Summerland Secondary School in the fall.

Nancy Darling, program administrator for trades and apprenticeship at Okanagan College, said the Home for Learning projects builds houses on spec, and then puts them up for sale when they're completed.

"We're going to sell the home for a profit, and the profit goes back into scholarships and bursaries for the students who worked on the home," said Darling, who added that a total of 29 students worked on the home — 11 in the residential construction program and 18 in the electrical program.

Darling said half of the money goes towards tools and equipment for a trades training facility, which the college hopes to eventually build

in the South Okanagan. The remainder is used to fund scholarships and bursaries for students to encourage them to move forward with their studies.

"It will cover off the cost of their tuition for their second, third and fourth year," said Darling. "We're trying to instill in them the concept of lifelong learning."

Because many in the trades find themselves headed in work after completing their first- or second-level training, they often don't get around to furthering their education, she said.

"It's a bit of an incentive for them to come back for that third and fourth year, and finish off and get their journey-person status," she said. "Then, when the pendulum swings the other way and it's kind of

a lean time, those with the best qualifications stay employed."

Students began the program in February, starting with some in-class instruction before getting into the hands-on element of the program, which involved work on the current house on Karlstrom Drive in Summerland.

Applying what he learned in class to an actual building is Gerzen's favourite part about the program. Gerzen said it was the perfect fit because it gave him a jump on pursuing a career in the construction industry while he was still in school.

"If you don't like sitting in the classroom all the time, work on doing an apprenticeship," he said.

For more information on the next residential construction program, call the college at 250-492-4905.