New apprenticeship program offers 'red seal' accreditation

Special to the Herald

The people who do the work of a construction craft worker are a vital part of every construction site and team. They install utility piping, place concrete, build roads, assist skilled tradespersons such as carpenters and bricklayers, and they set up and break down a job site among other work.

Now, British Columbia and Okanagan College are offering those who function in the role the opportunity for "red seal" accreditation. Starting in March, Okanagan College is offering a new two-level apprenticeship program to meet the provincial demand for the training.

"Construction labourers are professionals who have solid experience under their tool belts," said Okanagan College dean of trades and apprenticeship Steve Moore. "Earning this accreditation will make it easy for employers to determine that the worker is trained and skilled to perform the tasks at hand. For the worker, it can be the differentiator in getting hired."

"Knowing that our trades workers have a red seal gives me confidence that they have a strong understanding of construction and the necessary skills to be on any site," said Greyback Construction general manager Matt Kenyon. "Ultimately, it makes for a safer work environment and ensures projects are completed to the highest standards. At Greyback, we fully support the students of Okanagan College and will offer them work experience and site tours."

Penticton Indian band member Jason Bonneau has enrolled in Okanagan College's March program with encouragement from his employer at Greyback.

"I've only ever worked in construction. It fascinates me to have the knowledge of being able to make something out of nothing, to build it up," said the 38-year-old Bonneau. "As a father of five, providing for my family is a top priority. Obtaining my red seal as a construction craft worker means I can earn more money and grow a lifelong career in a field I'm passionate about."

A red seal designation allows individuals to become journeypersons with a higher earning potential, and they can participate in training new apprentices. It is a Canada-wide designation that translates into employability across the country, as cemented by the recent announcement in Nova Scotia that all premiers are in agreement to recognize interprovincial apprenticeship credentials by 2018 across all of Canada.

The certification is one that is recognized across industries including building projects, roadbed work, mining and forestry, oil and gas, and it is the most in-demand position for the anticipated LNG industry boom. The B.C. government forecasts that 11,800 construction trade workers will be needed by 2018 to support the LNG sector.

Okanagan College is one of a limited number of B.C. institutions offering the training program that consists of Level 1 and 2 (each four weeks long), as well as 4,000 work-based hours.

Blending instructor-led training with hands-on experience, students will attend class in the morning to learn methods and theories, and in the afternoon they apply that knowledge in their shop time.

The Kelowna campus program accommodates 16 students per level, and applications are still being accepted for the March 2 program intake. Mobile training opportunities are also available. For registration and program information, visit www.okanagan.bc.ca/apprenticeship.