

Jobs near me: Program offers pathway to construction jobs for minorities and women

Nathan Phelps, Green Bay Press-Gazette Published 9:13 a.m. CT Dec. 17, 2018

APPLETON - Brian Alden has an eye on eventually becoming an executive in the construction industry.

But he first aspires to be a project manager following his upcoming May graduation from Fox Valley Technical College's construction management program with a pair of associate degrees.

"I'm taking the long way," the 46-year-old Neenah resident said. "I started off with some field experience, gained educational credentials, then move into management and then become an executive."

Alden has spent the past six years learning about the construction business on the front lines through an apprenticeship and work with some of the largest construction contractors in northeastern Wisconsin.

He found his way into the industry through the Transportation Alliance for New Solutions, a six-week, free training program focused on getting minorities and women involved in heavy highway construction and other jobs in the industry.

The program covers topics such as reading blueprints and construction safety as well as soft skills like communication and interviewing for a job. It also provides an avenue for face-to-face contact with prospective employers and employees.

That's how Alden landed the apprenticeship that launched his career.

"TrANS gave me some exposure to the construction industry through networking events and the classes," he said.

The program graduated 33 students this year, with 32 landing jobs, said Ranard Morris, the TrANS program coordinator in Green Bay.

"Minorities and women did not have in-roads into the industry," he said. "What this program has done, is open people's eyes to this opportunity. They knew it existed ... they just didn't know how to get in."

Contractors and the skilled trades have faced a need for qualified workers in the past few years. Projections from the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development put the need at a little more than 12,000 new workers and managers by 2024.

TrANS classes will move to space at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College in 2019, Morris said. The program typically offers four sessions a year and, on average, has 40 to 45 students per year.

TrANS is a public-private program run by Forward Service Corp. of Madison, a private, nonprofit corporation that provides employment, training and support services in several fields. It has six programs throughout the state, including places like Crandon and Racine.

Morris said construction isn't for everyone. For those willing to travel around the state and county for work, and put in the hard work, the pay can be lucrative.

"The one thing I look for more than anything in my screening is motivation," he said. "These jobs are some of the most physically, mentally and emotionally challenging jobs you can find."

Morris talks about the program as a career builder for students, a talent pipeline for local contractors, and an economic asset to the area.

"Ninety-five percent of the people who have walked through these doors... were either underemployed, living at a poverty level, or no job at all," Morris said. "We have at least a \$27, \$28, (dollar per hour) average for our graduates. We've had close to 30 people in the last four years become homeowners."

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