



MCC students from the Kyrene Corridor are among the beneficiaries of a grant to promote learning in the construction trades.

Construction trades aspirants benefit from \$1 million gift to MCC

By Barbi Walker-Walsh

Tempe and West Chandler residents who aspire to build careers in the thriving construction industry have a new reason to celebrate.

A \$1 million Lowe's Foundation grant to the Maricopa County Community College District will enhance construction trades programs at

Mesa, South Mountain and Rio Salado community colleges, both of which are conveniently accessible to Kyrene Corridor residents.

With nearly 19 percent of MCCCCD's students from Tempe and Chandler, the investment boosts both cities' and the state's future.

Tempe, already experiencing rapid growth, is projected to see its population surge by 38 percent by 2060, fueling a 31 percent increase in employment, according to the Maricopa Association of Governments.

Chandler is also witnessing a construction boom, with major projects like the Go AZ Ave industrial development and the sprawling Schrader Farms Business Park underway. Thus, MCC and its related colleges, with enhanced construction

trade programs, seem to be at the forefront of shaping the area's tomorrow.

"The sky's the limit here," Tempe Mayor Corey Woods said in a recent article by Working Nation, which focused on Tempe's growth driving the opportunity for skilled trades and education.

He also noted that the grant's addition aligns perfectly with the city's vision of fostering a robust and trained workforce to support its development.

Maricopa County is short 195,000 skilled trades workers, according to David A. Cain, Ph.D., program director of construction management/ trades and architecture at MCC. Underscoring this urgency, he said that for every

five people retiring, only two are taking their place, opening up approximately 10 million skilled labor jobs nationwide.

The grant, crucial in this context, will enable MCC to expand its facilities, purchase state-of-the-art equipment, and hire additional staff, ensuring its students receive the highest caliber training.

Cain said the funds have enabled MCC to include a construction laydown yard similar to those found on most large building project sites in Maricopa County.

“The site provides students opportunities to learn how to navigate the weather conditions they will experience working in the construction industry in Arizona,” he said. The funds will also bolster South Mountain Community College’s Construction Trades Institute, which offers fast-track certificates in carpentry and electrical systems.

At Tempe-based Rio Salado College, Ken Wilk, Faculty Chair for Applied Technology, said the grant will support its unique Incarcerated Re-Entry Program. The program provides OSHA training and certifications to help individuals transition into successful careers upon release from prison, such as Don, who took advantage of Rio Salado College’s program while incarcerated.

He graduated with two degrees in 2017 and has embarked on a new life. Between 2011 and 2017, Don completed several work-based education programs, including electrical, carpentry and automotive. “While I was away, I began looking to try and find ways for those years not to be a total loss,” Don said.

“When I saw the opportunity to take classes and learn new skills, I jumped on it knowing I would have to reinvent myself upon release.” Don rounded out his education by finishing the general studies and elective credits required to complete associate degrees in arts and workforce re-entry.

“The education I received was immensely helpful,” he said. “I started out doing punch list work in the construction industry where I used the skills I learned in carpentry and electrical.”

Cain and other officials say the investment’s impact extends beyond individual students to the entire community. A well-trained construction workforce ensures high-quality, efficient project completion, attracting further investment and development. It also translates into good-paying jobs. According to the Construction Labor Market Analyzer, Arizona’s median annual pay for electricians and plumbers exceeds the state average.

