

## Building Trades Resurfacing at Former Connelley Trade School

When the Clifford B. Connelley Vocational High School opened its doors in the City of Pittsburgh in 1930, it was considered one of the premier trade schools in the country. With its spacious classroom and training facilities, high school students from throughout the city had the opportunity to be introduced to careers in construction by learning such crafts as carpentry, masonry and plumbing. Over the years, some 1,800 students a year were also able to take other building trade classes, such as in HVAC, electrical systems and welding. Overlooking Downtown Pittsburgh from its perch on Bedford Avenue in the Hill District, the once magnificent 220,000 square foot school exposed students to a myriad of career opportunities in an industry where jobs could never be outsourced. Sadly, that all came to an end in 2004, when the school's doors were closed and what little remained of vocational training was relocated. Today, only HVAC at Oliver High School and two small carpentry programs at Westinghouse and Carrick high schools remain.

But the closing of that facility (then known as the Connelley Technical Institute and Adult Education Center) did more than just signal the end of most vocational training in the city. It also signaled the end for city students to be broadly exposed to what residential, commercial and industrial construction involves. That is about to change. In 2011, Pittsburgh Gateways, a non-profit economic development support organization, purchased the former school and began to transform it into an urban complex that will promote energy sector research and innovation while creating pathways to job creation, entrepreneurship and urban revitalization.

Renamed the Energy Innovation Center, among tenants already occupying or planning to occupy the building are offices and testing facilities of several local colleges and universities including the University of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Mellon, Duquesne and CCAC. Representatives from Penn State are also occupying a portion of the building along with other tenants associated with energy development, be it wind, natural gas or other forms.

The Pittsburgh Regional Building Trades, and specifically 15 of the region's joint apprenticeship training centers, along with the Builders Guild of Western Pennsylvania are also planning to launch a new program at the facility called "Intro to the Trades." This two to three week educational program will give area men and women, primarily from the inner city, the opportunity to be truly exposed to construction, all that it is and all that it has to offer.

"Too many young men and women in the City of Pittsburgh have not had the chance to truly understand what construction is all about," said Rich Stanizzo, business manager of the Pittsburgh Regional Building and Construction Trades Council. "All that many of today's city school students understand is what they may see on television or in their own homes. The truth is there is much more to construction and many more opportunities for extremely rewarding careers than most people know. Through this new program, we hope to be able to expose hundreds of city residents each year to our industry and to the many crafts that can provide family sustaining employment."

Working with Pittsburgh Gateways and other local workforce development organizations, participants will first have the opportunity to hone their preparatory skills, including having the necessary math skills that are essential for construction workers. After four weeks of initial classwork, the participants will then hear directly from the area's joint apprenticeship training schools, including those for insu-



Stanley Plutnicki, (second from right), an instructor at the Joint Apprenticeship Training Center (JATC) for the Laborers' District Council of Western Pennsylvania, demonstrates how to properly inspect and wear a safety harness to a few volunteers participating in a six-week career orientation class for the construction industry at the Energy Innovation Center in Pittsburgh's Hill District. In the background against the wall are Tony Gammieri (right) and John Hamilton from the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades District Council #57.

lators, painters, drywall finishers, glaziers, ironworkers, bricklayers, cement masons, carpenters, laborers, operating engineers, plasterers, plumbers, steamfitters, electricians, sheet metal workers, and roofers.

In addition to classroom presentations, the participants will also have the opportunity to visit many of the training centers to interface with practicing apprentices to better understand how the apprenticeship programs work and what they can expect to encounter and experience as construction workers.

To participate in the "Intro to the Trades" program, participants must be at least 18 years of age, have a high school diploma or GED, have a valid Pennsylvania Driver's License (or be actively working to obtain one) and be drug free.

"We are looking forward to fine tuning the curriculum and launching this industrywide initiative to help both the community and the building trades, where there is anticipated to be a high demand for workers over the next five to 10 years," said Jason Fincke, executive director of the Builders Guild of Western Pennsylvania. "In addition to increased construction activity, particularly in the commercial and industrial markets, there will be a great need to replace workers from the Baby Boomer Generation who are retiring after years of service.

"To attract young men and women today, however, they must first be exposed to what construction is all about. While working as an apprentice and then journeyman does not require a college degree, it does require more education. While the work is mentally and physically challenging, it can also be very financially rewarding, as most union building trades workers will out earn the vast majority of college graduates over the course of their careers."

As plans are finalized, more information on the "Intro to the Trades" program will be available through the Builders Guild's website: [www.buildersguild.org](http://www.buildersguild.org). In the meantime, the Connelley Trade School is coming back, and the union building trades are coming with it.