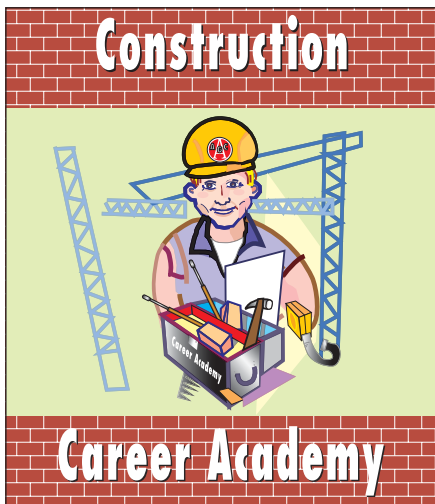


# OPENING DOORS

## EAST RIDGE HIGH SCHOOL CAREER ACADEMY LOOKS TO THE FUTURE



**F**or years, educators, students, and their parents have turned up their noses at careers in the construction industry, not realizing that it has more to offer than a pair of dirty work boots. Today, AGC, in conjunction with the construction community, works to rid the industry of its negative stigma. In November 2003, AGC of East Tennessee and AGC of America co-sponsored an open house/orientation at East Ridge High School Career Academy. The open house was an initiative by AGC to educate representatives from chapters around the country about the merits, successes, and benefits of the academy and about how they, too, might launch career academies in their own states.

"We tried to show other AGC chapters how we put together the footprint for the construction career academy," says Roger D. Tuder, president of the AGC of East Tennessee.

### A CONVERSATION ABOUT CURRICULUM AND CAREERS

The AGC-sponsored open house revealed the construction community's strong commitment to the school and satisfied a number of other goals. AGC's objectives for the open house included allowing visitors to:

- Understand the academy by interacting with students and staff members;
- See how the local construction community supports the academy;
- Learn how to establish a construction career academy;
- Understand the advantages of the curriculum;

□ Determine the appropriateness of a career academy for other communities; and

□ Learn how the AGC of America assists chapters in establishing academies.

For two days, interested AGC chapters met with teachers, the education board, city officials, and students to discover how to develop and integrate a similar program to meet their specific community needs. The representatives of the interested parties were taken to the high school to see how the students actually felt.

### INSTRUCTION WITH CONSTRUCTION

In 2002, the East Ridge High School Career Academy in Chattanooga, Tenn., opened its doors to students. This school-within-a-school combines a traditional academic curriculum with a construction careers curriculum to produce a rigorous and productive learning environment. During the open house, the representatives from the 14 states were able to discuss the curricula with the faculty and, more importantly, with the students.

Students recounted the academy's importance with great fervor. Some students were happy for the opportunity to pursue a formal education, while others claimed they were pleased with their rising grades and the possibility of a career. Students find the curriculum more relevant to their lives. For many, interest in what they learn goes hand in hand with grade improvement. One of the AGC's goals in this particular institution was to prepare students for higher education or to directly enter the construction workforce.

AGC and East Ridge High School were very pleased with the orientation. "It was a huge success," says Tuder. "The students spoke, and we engaged in a very frank and open conversation. Perhaps the most enlightening aspect of the conversation was that students said they felt like their teachers really cared."

### BUILDING BRIDGES

At the academy, it is not only the teachers who care but also the construction industry at large. The AGC of East Tennessee members became involved in establishing the Career Academy from day one, and continue to be an integral part of the education process. Chapter members recognize the value of East Ridge Career Academy graduates and thus support them with both time and money.



*During the open house, students recounted their experiences at East Ridge Career Academy to an audience of 14 AGC chapters that were interested in starting a career academy in their region.*

The chapter has worked to coordinate opportunities outside the classroom such as working with the Southeast Labor Training Fund and the "job-shadowing program." The job-shadowing program is particularly important because it's student specific. AGC believes teachers and faculty should receive onsite training to better understand the industry and to integrate real-world practices into the lesson plan.

Students discussed the job-shadowing program during the orientation. They explained how general contractors, subcontractors, and superintendents from AGC's Young Constructors Forum took three students per worker to experience a typical workday in the field. Back in the classroom, students made mock estimates and discussed the successes and challenges of the workplaces.

Working together, the AGC of East Tennessee and East Ridge High School have created a model career academy. This school is a pilot for AGC and has a successful curriculum supplemented with relevant "in-the-field" activities; it is sure to be a model for other institutions in years to come.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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