

RETRAINING FOR A NEW LIFE...

FOR 100 FORMER PAPER MILL WORKERS, JOB RETRAINING BY THE ASSOCIATED CONSTRUCTORS OF MAINE IS A LIFESAVER



ACM-CERTIFIED HEAVY EQUIPMENT OPERATOR PROGRAM ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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Above left: Heavy Equipment Operator Program students engage in the core curriculum classroom portion of the training.

Left: Eastern Maine Community College instructor Gene Fadrigon II (center) discusses the ACM-certified Heavy Equipment Training Program curriculum with students Douglas Farquhar and Cheryl Albert.

Thanks to a concerted effort by several Associated Constructors of Maine (ACM) members and staff, the chapter recently launched a much-needed Heavy Equipment Operator program in central Maine. ACM filled all the seats of its first two heavy equipment classes (of 30 students each) with former paper mill-workers who were downsized by Great Northern Paper (GNP) in late December 2002. This program, coupled with AGC's Supervisory Training Program (STP), will provide critical retraining for many former mill workers and others displaced from Maine's struggling manufacturing industries. Both the Heavy Equipment Program, which costs just under \$4,000 per student, and AGC's STP will be funded by federal grant money.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF MAINE AND THE INDUSTRY

The program was originally proposed by Herb Sargent, Sargent & Sargent, Hampden, Maine, during his 2001 ACM presidency. Since then, a task force comprising chapter members and staff, as well as educational representatives, has worked to turn the plan into reality. "It's been very exciting in the sense that we're

fulfilling a need for our industry," said ACM Workforce Development Director Gene Fadrigon III during a recent interview with the *Maine Sunday Telegram*. "But to put that together with being able to retrain the people in Millinocket—that's going to allow the whole community to prosper."

The ACM-certified classes are based on training designed by the National Center for Construction Education & Research (NCCER), with some modifications made to address the needs of Maine's construction industry. For instance, Cianbro Corporation, Pittsfield, and The Cote Corp., Auburn, tailored the crane operation portion of the training, while Barrett Paving Materials, Dover-Foxcroft, The Lane Construction Corp., Bangor, and Pike Industries Inc., Lewiston, pitched in to make the paving section more applicable to Maine conditions.

Consisting of four courses—the core curriculum, plus Equipment Operations, Parts One through Three—the complete program comprises 375 hours of instruction split nearly evenly between classroom and hands-on training. The classes take place in Bangor at Eastern Maine Community College and United Technologies Center. Students who graduate

will be qualified to operate machinery at jobsites across the state.

AGC'S STP FOR WORKERS WITH MANAGEMENT BACKGROUND

Additionally, ACM is currently working with the Training & Development Corporation to provide the complete nine-module Supervisory Training Program (STP) to management-level mill employees who were laid off as part of the GNP bankruptcy. All told, 40 have signed up so far. As with the Heavy Equipment Operator Program, federal grant money will underwrite the training costs.

ACM will continue to market its training programs to unemployed millworkers and others who have been affected by the manufacturing job losses statewide. The chapter has developed strong relationships with the entities charged with administering federal retraining grants in Maine, as well as several career centers and the State Department of Labor.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Maine has the worst record nationwide for recent manufacturing job losses (percentage-wise). From July 2000 until August 2003, Maine dropped 17,800 manufacturing jobs for a 22.1 percent loss. The state unemployment rate also just crept up to five percent. This displacement and uncertainty may be a menacing cloud over the lives of Maine's manufacturing workers for some time to come, but ACM will provide a silver lining for many.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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