



UA apprenticeship instructor Dave Hiebert shows Tigard High School senior Alex Hawk the art of brazing a copper pipe joint.



UA Local 290 apprentice Ben Caswell shows students from Tigard and Tualatin high schools how to braze. Looking on is Local 290 Business Manager John Endicott.

High school students get lessons in pipe trades at UA training center

Plumbers and Fitters Local 290 has opened its training center to students from the Tigard-Tualatin School District.

Under the tutelage of apprenticeship instructor Dave Hiebert and apprentices Ben Caswell and Darrel Lawrence, 11 students from Tualatin and Tigard high school spend an hour every other day learning to weld, braze, solder — and experience first-hand how important math is to the trade.

“Most of these kids have never applied math to work,” said Local 290 Business Manager John Endicott. “Once they did, they connected the importance of math.”

Just to apply to the apprenticeship program requires one year of high school algebra. To get in, however, will likely take much more than that.

“If you decide to go this route, you’ll be competing with others who have lots of math,” Hiebert told the students. “Math is a very important part of this trade.”

The students, a mix of sophomores, juniors, and seniors taking industrial arts and technology and career education classes, paid close attention to their instructors the entire class.

“The students are very attentive; there is no screwing around,” said UA Director of Training Mike Pollock. “They’re asking a lot of good questions. Several students say they are very interested in the trade.”

“I’m really pleased with what took place today (brazing),” Hiebert added.

“I’m told this is all they talk about with their friends at school.”

Endicott told the Labor Press he wants to expand the program. “This is not a one-time thing. We’re gearing up to do it right,” he said.

Pollock said discussions are under way to extend the class through spring term and to expand it next year to two classes every other day with 20 students in each class.

Initially, the training center was going to foot the entire bill, including safety equipment and bus transporta-

tion to and from school. The Plumbing Mechanical Contractors Association then offered to assist with the purchase of safety gear, if needed. Students get to keep welding jackets, welding hoods, safety glasses, and gloves.

Pollock said none of that was necessary, however, because after learning about the class, the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries steered the training center to a \$10,000 federal grant that covered the cost of transportation, safety gear, and instructors’ pay.

(Editor’s Note: Four years ago, Lo-


cal 290 wrote letters to the superintendents of the Tigard-Tualatin, Wilsonville, and Sherwood school districts offering free use of their training center. Getting no response, the union followed up with letters to school board members in those districts. Still nothing.

Upset but staying positive, union and training officials continued promoting their facility to whomever would listen.

Business Manager John Endicott said he told the story every time he talked to a politician.

Then, earlier this year, Training Director Mike Pollock said a parent of a Tigard-Tualatin School District student approached him randomly for ideas on how to get students exposed to shop classes, since they weren’t being offered at school. Pollock told the man of the training center’s plight with the school district and how its invitations to use the facility went unanswered. A short while after that conversation, the Tigard-Tualatin School District called Endicott asking about bringing students to the training center.)

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