



Under the tutelage of apprenticeship instructors Bernie and Rick Hindman, students from Tualatin and Tigard high schools attend industrial technology classes at the Matt J. Walters Training Center, home of Plumbers and Fitters Local 290.

The students — a mix of mostly juniors and seniors — spend an hour every other day learning to weld, braze, solder, do mechanical drawings, and experience how math is applied to the trade. Just to apply to the apprenticeship program requires one year of high school algebra and a minimum 2.0 GPA. To get accepted, however, will take much more than that. The class is limited to 26 students and is worth 0.5 credits toward graduation.

“This course is designed to provide opportunities for students to pursue journeymen and apprenticeship programs related to industrial trades,” reads the curriculum guide from Tigard High School.

The Hindmans are twin brothers who both graduated from Portland’s Benson Polytechnic High School and are both Local 290 retirees. They said they try to incorporate the experiences they had at Benson into their instruction at the training center. The Hindmans keep track of attendance and score tests at the end of each term. They also present special awards for the top project and most improved student.

“We touch on the basics. It’s not as extensive as a first-term apprentice,” said Bernie Hindman.

“Most of these kids know very little about apprenticeship training, or the union,” added Rick Hindman. “But they’re quick learners. It amazes me how fast they are able to pick up on things.”

The students are outfitted with safety boots, jackets, gloves, and glasses. They get to keep the boots. The class is funded entirely by the apprenticeship training trust — to the tune of about \$50,000. In the past, the contractors association has chipped in supplies, and one year the training center received a \$10,000 federal grant.

The training center is always looking for new grants to help offset the cost, said Assistant Coordinator Justin May. “Since the ‘90s, school districts have pulled away from vocational training. It’s important to us to keep this going,” he said.

A Tualatin graduate who took the industrial education class three times starting in his sophomore year recently was accepted into Local 290’s apprenticeship program.

“I didn’t have any direction before,” Casey Rowbottom, 19, told the Labor Press. “I wasn’t really interested in anything. Now I have direction,”



UA Local 290 apprenticeship instructors Rick and Bernie Hindman start a high school industrial technology class at the union’s training center. The course is worth credits toward graduation at Tualatin and Tigard high schools.

Plumbers & Fitters Local 290 Training Center is home to Tigard-Tualatin School District Industrial Arts Class

Rowbottom said he saw the class offering on the schedule, read the description, and decided to sign up.

“He showed a real knack for welding,” Rick Hindman said.

After graduating from Tualatin High, Rowbottom took an 18-week accelerated welding program the training center offers.

As a first-term apprentice, Rowbottom now works full time at a nearby fabrication shop where he is paid \$15.88 an hour, plus health insurance and retirement benefits. He will receive regular raises as he progresses through the training program.

Prior to the start of a class on May 8, the Labor Press asked students why they signed up for the course. Answers varied from “my counselor recommended it,” to “it’s fun” to “I want to learn a new skill.” One student said people he knows in his community “have to pay to learn this stuff. It’s a real privilege for me to be able to be here. It gives us a great foundation for our future.”

The Hindmans said initially students heard about the class from other students. “Now, a lot of kids hear about it from their school career counselors, who get good feedback from the kids,” they said.



PHOTO LEFT: High school students enrolled in the industrial technology course at the Matt J. Walters Training Center in Tualatin pose for a picture after a welding class.

PHOTO TOP RIGHT: Casey Rowbottom is a first term Local 290 apprentice who took the course as a student at Tualatin High School.

PHOTO RIGHT: Apprenticeship instructor Rick Hindman supervises a student with a flat plate weld.

