



PIPELINE TO GOOD JOBS
Members of Congress tour Local 290 training center

TUALATIN, OREGON — Local 290's Training Center got a visit May 9 from two high-powered guests: Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici (D-Oregon) and Congressman Bobby Scott (D-Virginia). Scott, the most senior Democrat on the U.S. House Education and Workforce Committee, was visiting Portland-area programs related to his committee's mission, hosted by Bonamici, who also serves on the committee.

The two members of Congress and their staffs came to

United Association of Plumbers and Steamfitters Local 290 to see what a state-of-the-art union apprenticeship training center looks like, and were given a tour by Local 290 training director Clare Shropshire and her husband, Local 290 business manager Al Shropshire. The enormous facility — funded entirely by union members and employers — has 30 classrooms and millions of dollars worth of technical equipment. Bonamici and Scott saw parts of it, including classrooms for training on med-

gas piping, HVAC systems, back-flow control devices, and orbital welding equipment.

Local 290 members install, maintain and repair pipes, not just in construction but in all kinds of high- and low-tech industrial applications, from paper mills to hospitals and semiconductor chip plants. About 400 apprentices are currently enrolled at the Tualatin training center and six satellite campuses around Oregon and Northern California. It's a five-year training program that combines



Left: UA Local 290 training director Clare Shropshire explains an orbital welder to Suzanne Bonamici and Bobby Scott, with a little help from business manager Al Shropshire. Above: In a backflow classroom at the UA 290 training center, apprenticeship instructor Chris MacQuarrie handles an old lead pipe. Today, not only pipe but solder and brass fittings are lead-free. But lead pipes are still commonly in use in older buildings.

8,000 hours of paid on-the-job training with 1,080 hours of job-related classroom training — two three-hour classes per week, tuition-free. At the end of it all, the apprentices become journeymen plumbers and steamfitters, and earn wages of \$42.83 an hour plus \$23.42 an hour in benefits.

What can Congress do to help the training center succeed, Bonamici wanted to know. Just make sure young people get a good K-12 education, replied Al Shropshire. Local 290's training

program requires only a high school diploma or equivalent, but applicants need good reading comprehension and familiarity with basic math — especially algebra and trigonometry.

That — and tell people not to overlook careers in the trades — Clare Shropshire added.

"Most parents assume their kids should be on a college path, and don't think about the trades," she said, "but we have applicants with bachelors' and masters' degrees. These are good jobs."

Teamsters fight beer mega-merger

America has laws against monopolies. Will they be enforced? Belgium-headquartered Anheuser-Busch Inbev last November announced plans to merge with UK-headquartered SABMiller. The merged company — with 60 percent of the American beer market — would be able to use its dominance in production and distribution to curb competition. To get approval for the merger from federal antitrust regulators, SABMiller proposes to sell its stake in the Miller Coors joint venture to its partner, Molson Coors.

But David Laughton, head of the Brewery Workers' Conference of the Teamsters Union, says Miller Coors didn't even wait for the merger before anti-competitive practices began: Two days before merger talks were announced, Miller Coors announced plans to close its Eden, North Carolina, megabrewery in September 2016, eliminating 349 union jobs. The closure would eliminate 4 per-

cent of U.S. beer production capacity, and would harm competitor Pabst, which contracts with other companies to make all of its beer brands. Though Eden is the main brewery making Pabst, Miller Coors said it wouldn't sell the brewery to Pabst, just close it, and then would almost triple the price it charges to brew Pabst beer.

"It's no secret that the beer industry in the U.S. is not behaving competitively," said antitrust lawyer Allen Grunes in a conference call hosted by the Teamsters. "The industry has had a history of price coordination and has had price increases even in the face of volume decline."

Laughton says the closure is about contracting supply and raising prices, not a result of declining demand or excess capacity: Highly-automated Eden is Miller Coors' ultra-efficient "crown jewel," and has operated seven days a week, mostly 24-hours-a-day, for the last 10 to 15 years.



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