

Students learn techniques on Green Jobs Mentoring Day

by Angela Webber

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Portland YouthBuilders students Denis Sizman, top left, and Jeff Arneson, lower left, listen as Robert Hamerly, an energy efficiency specialist with GreenSavers USA, speaks about energy consumed by a home furnace during an energy audit demonstration last week. (Photo by Sam Tenney/DJC)

Jeff Catlin is passionate about energy efficiency. When he was laid off from his job in 2009, he started the [Energy Conservation Training Co.](#), which prepares people for careers in the energy performance field. The firm contracts with local colleges to provide training and private test houses in Portland.

Catlin says it's important for the next generation of builders to think about the energy choices they're making in construction – such as use of air-tight insulation or recycled materials.

"There were problems during the construction boom," he said. "Contractors weren't as motivated to slow down and build in a thoughtful way. There wasn't an ethic of making a building efficient."

Catlin donated materials and provided his business' test houses for a recent mentoring event in which

students from the [Portland YouthBuilders](#) program were connected with contractors, energy auditors and others to learn about home performance. Students conducted mock energy audits for Portland houses and met workers who perform weatherization upgrades.

Amber Ford joined the Portland YouthBuilders program as a way to receive free training for a construction career. The audit and the site visit were informative, she said.

"They used a smoke pencil to find leaks in the house," Ford said.

"A lot more things were leaking than I thought were going to leak," student **Devin Leino** said. "If a house is drafty you can lose a lot of heat."

Portland YouthBuilders construction program manager **Bill Kowalczyk** said he hoped the students could learn from the career paths of the mentors they met in their workshops.

"Weatherization itself is not a glamorous job, but it's a job that, with proper training, you can make a living at in short order – and it's something to build upon," he said. "That's the key in this economy – building a ladder to a career with stackable credentials."

For example, a weatherization contractor could become an auditor. And Catlin, once a field representative for Energy Star programs, founded and sold a business.

Catlin said there are jobs for people interested in these careers.

"We're seeing a lot of job creation happening, finally," he said.



Robert Hamerly, fourth from left, an energy efficiency specialist with GreenSavers USA, speaks about energy saving features on a home's exterior during a presentation at an event last week. Observers include, from left, Alec Meadows, a Portland YouthBuilder construction trainer, and Portland YouthBuilders students Denis Sizmin, Jeff Arneson, Amber Ford and Devin Leino. (Photo by Sam Tenney/DJC)

Catlin said that over the last three years, an increasing number of graduates from ECONTC programs have gotten jobs, and his business gets six to eight calls per month from businesses looking to hire his graduates.

"Any folks who come through our courses and are motivated are getting jobs out there," he said.

Kowalczyk said that some students were offered internships during the green career day. But he said that even students who aren't interested in becoming weather-proofers or auditors – Ford, for example, said the field doesn't have enough "adventure" – still benefit because they learn about energy efficiency.

"The more training they have in energy efficiency, the more valuable their services are in the workplace," said **Don MacOdrum**, executive director of the [Home Performance Contractors Guild of Oregon](#). "A home performance contractor loves working with someone who understands energy efficiency."

MacOdrum is among a group of local professionals who created the Portland YouthBuilders event because they want the next generation of builders to know about energy efficiency.

"This generation of kids will be responsible for making our housing stock," said **Kendra Van Note**, community outreach and education director with [GreenSavers USA](#) and organizer of the event. "We're passing on our knowledge of building science to them, so that when they go into construction trade that they have that awareness. That's what I want them to get."

Van Note has run a similar career day in Bend for the last two years, and hopes to run a second Portland event next year.

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