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Phoebe Projects Could Help Spur Interest In Construction Industry Jobs

Albany, Ga. – The two biggest current construction projects in the Albany area are on Phoebe’s main campus. The Trauma & Critical Care Tower is slated to open in the fall, and the Living & Learning Community will welcome Albany Technical College nursing students this summer. But, finding enough skilled workers to build both projects has been a challenge.

“The market is strained everywhere. It’s worse right now than it’s ever been in the 41 years I’ve been in the construction business,” said David Howe, Senior Superintendent for Hoar Construction, the large Birmingham-based company building the new tower.

As many as 265 workers have been on the site at one time, with a total of 950 jobs over the entirety of the project. Most of those workers temporarily relocated to Albany, often from hundreds of miles away.

The situation is only slightly different a block away where Albany’s Pellicano Construction is the general contractor at the Living & Learning Community worksite. “We’ve worked as hard as we can to find as many locals as possible, but we have a lot from out of town,” said Pat Etheridge, Pellicano’s Chief Operating Officer. “There aren’t nearly enough skilled people for any of the trades, so we have to try to grow them ourselves or teach them ourselves. We’re getting back to apprenticeships and developing our own people as much as possible,” he added.

A strong relationship with Albany Technical College (ATC) is helping. Recently, a couple dozen students from the school’s carpentry program toured the Living & Learning Community site. 16-year-old Ashton Palmer said it was an extremely beneficial trip.

“It was just nice to see everything we’ve been learning about in class out in the real world,” he said. “My favorite part was talking with some of the workers and looking up to them and seeing what they’ve accomplished. It’s inspiring to see people doing what I want to do.”

Palmer is a junior at Westover High School who is dual-enrolled at ATC. After classes, he gets several hours of on-the-job experience each day, and he will be able to work even more next year. “I can go ahead and get certified while I’m still in high school and get out in the workforce earlier,” said Palmer who plans to own his own construction-related business one day.

A separate group of construction students recently toured the Trauma & Critical Care Tower site. They’re part of YouthBuild, a program through the Albany Housing Authority (AHA) funded by a federal grant. “We service young people from 16-24 who did not finish high school, for whatever reason. We help them get their GED while they get job training,” said Whitney Hooks, Albany Housing Authority Job Developer.

Currently, 14 students are enrolled in YouthBuild in Albany, but the program has room for 20 more and is taking applications through the AHA website and in-person at the AHA office.

“We were excited to welcome these groups to Phoebe because we are committed to finding small, local and minority contractors to handle as much work as possible whenever we have building projects. We want these students to see the opportunities available to them here in southwest Georgia and know that – if they’re able to progress to a point where they run a business – we’ll have work for them at Phoebe,” said Jen Williams, PhD, Phoebe Chief Diversity, Inclusion and Community Benefit Officer.

The team from Hoar had a clear message for the YouthBuild students they spent time talking with. “There’s good money to be made if you want to get out there and work. You don’t have to have a college degree. College isn’t for everyone, and we just want them to know about all the opportunities they could take advantage of,” Howe said.

Leaders from Hoar and Pellicano say the recent tours at Phoebe were productive aspects of their outreach to students as they try to convince more young people to consider careers in construction.

“The students were very excited. They received it well, and I feel like they got a lot out of it,” Etheridge said.

Howe agreed. “They were pretty pumped about it. Some of them said, ‘well, can I start tomorrow?’”

While the answer to that question isn’t “yes,” there’s no doubt those students are in-demand, and – with a little hard work and determination – they can build long and lucrative careers in construction.

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EDITOR’S NOTE: Attached photos show YouthBuild and Albany Technical College students touring construction sites on Phoebe’s main campus, including a picture of ATC student Ashton Palmer and Hoar Construction Senior Superintendent David Howe.



