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WINDOW ROCK, NAVAJO NATION, ARIZONA 86515-0310



The Navajo Department of Workforce Development graduated its 2015 class here. (Courtesy photo)

Diné among iron working graduates

PHOENIX – A two-year effort to fill high-demand ironworking jobs and pull Navajos out of poverty is generating several success stories.

The District Council of Iron Workers of the State of California and Vicinity began a partnership in 2013 with the Navajo Department of Workforce Development to help students build skills needed to land good-paying jobs constructing high-rises, bridges, sports stadiums, solar farms and amusement park rides. The main focus has been attracting men and women to the trade via a hands-on, five-week training program that, upon graduation, provides guaranteed job placement with health and retirement benefits.

The program graduated its fourth class – this one with 18 students – on April 30, 2015. Students learned welding, blueprint reading, rigging, structural and reinforcing standards and safety in preparation for an apprenticeship. “Work is good, and our

contractors need men and women ready to work. Training is essential,” says Dick Zampa Jr., apprenticeship director for the District Council. “Our program prepares students for the job and helps build successful careers.”

Organizers point to a number of positive stories, with students finding steady work with contractors, including Gerda Reinforcing and Paradise Rebar.

Rusty Secody, 21, of Tuba City, is one of many success stories.

“I’ve been working every day (during the week) the last couple of months,” says Secody, who graduated from the ironworker program last year. “I’m paying my bills. Everything is going great.”

A first-year apprentice, Secody doesn’t think he’d be as successful had he not learned about the introductory training program through a job fair. He’s now in Yuma, Ariz., building a hospital.

Upon completion of an apprenticeship, highly skilled ironworker journeypersons can command better-than-average wages. The median income for structural ironworkers was \$53,140 in 2014, while reinforcing ironworkers pulled in \$54,810, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. At the same time, job growth for ironworkers is projected at 22 percent for the 10-year period ending 2022, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. All jobs are projected to grow 11 percent in the same period. The potential for earning a good income is a big appeal for the students.

Jeremiah Begay, 27, of Farmington, hopes this will be the start of a great career. He had been detailing cars before learning about the program.

“This provides much more opportunity for a better living,”

says Begay, who graduated top of his class April 30. “I like working outside with my hands and tools.”

Neilsen Joe, 36, also turned to the program to seek a better living. He had been working as a rancher when his mother told him about the training program. He’s glad he applied through the Navajo Department of Workforce Development.

“I’m hoping to further my career and build a good future,” he says.

Laman Moreno, operations manager with Gerda Reinforcing, employs three graduates, including Secody from whom he has high expectations.

“Rusty is my diamond in the rough,” Moreno says. “He can be a leader one day.”

Terry Wright, business manager for Ironworkers Local 75, says the five-week training program is a great way to attract new workers to the trade.

“We offer a rewarding career with good wages,” Wright says.

The 18 graduates include Anderson Albert, Jeremiah Begay, James Begay III, TyGregory Bellison, Joshua Burbank, Felix Sisco, Darrin Dayzie, Patricia Freeman, Kyle Hunt, Nielsen Joe, Justin John, Royce Key, Coy KeVine, Leon Woody, Garrett Neal, Rodney Nez, Gilbert Sam, and Lavon Tso Jr.

Additional training classes are in development to help recruit and prepare men and women for apprenticeships and long-term careers in the trade. Another class is expected to begin in the fall.

The District Council of Iron Workers of the State of California and Vicinity operates training centers in California, Nevada and Arizona.

Information: www.dciw.org/public.