

Prison subcontractor will set up apprenticeship program

Barbara Tetreault

BERLIN— Ten local individuals will have an opportunity to earn a starting wage of \$12.50 an hour on the federal prison construction while receiving training and instruction that will lead to a journeyman plumber license at the end of four years.

Local employment agencies said they hope the apprenticeship program with J.B. Bell Corporation will lead to other such arrangements as they try to maximize the economic opportunities offered by the federal prison.

“This is a really exciting opportunity,” said Mark Belanger, head of the Berlin office of N.H. Employment Security.

“This kind of collaboration doesn’t happen often enough,” said Paul Delaney of Family Resource Center’s Job Opportunity Basics Program (JOBPro).

Belanger said the goal is to see the local work force benefit from the prison construction. He said in August representatives from his office, the N.H. Community College in Berlin, JOBPro, and NHWorks met with Bob Rose of J.B. Bell to explore employment opportunities for local workers. Out of that meeting, came the apprentice program.

Rose cited the firm’s desire to use as much local labor as possible on the job as the main reason for the partnership.

“On a project of this size and scope we have to bring in some of our own staff already familiar with the company policies, vendors, and equipment. However, we are hoping to hire a number of individuals from the local area, including ten or twelve interested in entering our apprentice plumber program.”

Information sessions on the plumbing apprenticeship will be held Wednesday, Oct. 24 at N.H. Employment Security in Berlin from 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. and from 5 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. People unable to attend should call Paul Delaney at 466-5021.

The apprentice program is a four year commitment with a combination of on-the-job training and classroom instruction. Apprentices will receive \$12.50 per hour to start with increases every six months.

The program requires 144 hours of classroom instruction per year. Bell and the employment agencies are working on the curriculum with the N.H. Community College.

Most of the on-the-job training will take place at the federal prison site. For the fourth year, apprentices can either sign on to another Bell work site or seek out a local sponsor. During the training period apprentices will progress through a series of levels, eventually reaching the level of journeyman plumber.

Individuals who go through the JOBPro program will be given preferential consideration for the apprenticeships. The JOBPro curriculum has been modified by Bell to better prepare participants for a career in the mechanical trades.

Once the apprentices are selected and hired by Bell, they will immediately enroll at NHCC -Berlin where their in-classroom instruction will continue under the state-approved apprenticeship program. The apprentices probably won’t actually begin working on the prison site until April or May of 2008. By that time they will have four or five months of classroom preparation.

Recruitment will be done by NHWORKS, 151 Pleasant Street, Berlin, NH 03570. To apply, contact Aldea D'Alfonso at 752-5500 Ext. 92303 or Grant Goulet at 752-5500 Ext. 92319. The effort is a partnership between John P. Bell & Sons, New Hampshire Community College - Berlin, JOBPro, New Hampshire Employment Security, Workforce Investment Act and USDOL Apprenticeship Program