

MINNESOTA UTILITIES INTRODUCE INITIATIVES TO PREPARE STUDENTS FROM DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS FOR ENERGY CAREERS

by Shari Wormwood, Communication Specialist

Minnesota, known as an innovative state, is always on the cusp with inventive ideas as well as implementing new technologies and programs. Many agree this ingenuity and enterprise is a result of willingness to look at diverse perspectives, a strong work ethic and high educational standards. Minnesota has embraced the ingenuity that comes with collaboration from all ethnic backgrounds. The energy industry though, even across the US, has lagged behind because family members who have worked in the field have passed down the trade. This is truer in the rural areas, but they are now seeing populations that are more diverse.

To turn this trend around, The Minnesota Energy Consortium (MEC), comprised of educators and industry partners, has a vision to adequately staff the energy sector with a qualified and diverse workforce to provide safe and reliable energy. Their mission is to provide a connecting point for the energy industry, government, and higher education to work together to pursue actions that will meet the immediate and future needs of the energy industry workforce.

In 2016, The MEC launched a new program in Minneapolis and St. Paul schools titled "Legacy Minnesota" to prepare underserved youth for energy careers. The program was patterned after the Legacy I-3, a program developed by TCI Solutions of Phoenix in 2012. The program model identifies and effectively addresses the root causes of the persistent challenge of attracting, developing, and retaining qualified, local, and diverse talent. The model is based on a collaborative approach that synchronizes and leverages existing resources from five key sectors:

1. The relevant industry/company
2. Local secondary educational institutes
3. Local postsecondary institutes
4. Local/national community-based organizations
5. Federal, state and local government agencies

Deon Clark, CEO of TCI solutions explains, "Legacy I-3 provides foundational needed life skills for candidates such as emotional



Legacy MN Graduates - Summer 2016

intelligence, critical thinking, and character development. Common employability skills are then taught in the context of what they mean in a student's personal, school, and work environment." Legacy also brings industry partners into the classroom to assist with teaching employability skills. "We select employers who have employees available for classroom visits," said Clark, "and they give the students their perspective on what these skills mean, how they can enhance their chances of being hired and moving upward within the company."

Bruce Peterson, director of the MEC said, "This is the opportunity, as I see it, to really break the cycle, to help students see that there are opportunities in their own back yard that they do not know exist. We have to help build our workforce through all diverse populations. That's the only way."

This summer, nineteen high school juniors and seniors completed the first Minnesota program, staffed by the Phoenix Legacy personnel with support from Harding High School staff. Neighborhood House in St. Paul provided family support services and Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) were set up through Family Assets for Independence in Minnesota (FAIM) to enable the students to escape poverty and achieve wealth through saving with opportunities for matching multiplier grants for postsecondary education tuition.

This fall saw Patrick Henry and Roosevelt High Schools implement the program and Harding introduced another group of students.



Harding High School Legacy MN participants

The Legacy Minnesota program was made possible by grants from Xcel Energy, and support funding through the Minnesota Energy Center. If interested in implementing or supporting this sort of initiative in your community, visit www.energycareersminnesota.com or email Bruce Peterson (mailto: bpeterson@sctcc.edu) at the Minnesota Energy Center.