'Ready to Work' grant program trains students for petrochemical careers

Free program offered through the workforce center targets unemployed & underemployed

BAYTOWN, TX — After completing free training at Lee College and earning craft and trade credentials recognized by employers around the country, nearly 40 students are now ready to begin careers in the booming petrochemical industry.

Lee College celebrated in late May the newest graduates of the H-1B Ready to Work Petrochem Grant program funded by the U.S. Department of Labor. Offered through the Center for Workforce and Community Development at no cost to eligible participants, the program is designed to help the long-term unemployed and underemployed gain the knowledge and skills they need to prepare for high-growth and high-demand industry jobs in the Texas Gulf Coast region. Courses include pipefitting, welding, millwright, electrical, instrumentation, first-line supervisor, project management and process technology refresher — all taught by instructors with years of professional experience, using the latest tools of the trade and new technology found in the real-world working environment.

Dedra Moore had been looking to get into instrumentation for two years when she learned about the H-1B grant program and was referred to Lee College by Workforce Solutions.

“I didn’t give it a second thought; I was determined to get into that class and I didn’t want to miss a thing,” Moore said. “Our instructors were amazing. They motivated us and made sure each individual student understood every concept. They gave us 100 percent more than what we learned in the textbook. We were taught what to expect when we get into the industry, things to look for and the right questions to ask. When we get out there, we’ll know exactly what we’re looking at and what to do.”

At the end of each course, students receive certificates confirming they have successfully completed training and earned the National Center for Construction Education & Research (NCCER) credentials that employers in the petrochemical and construction industries trust and can verify.

“With all your hard work and dedication, you persisted to the end,” Marsha Tuha, director of Workforce Development, told the graduates. “This is the first step toward some amazing changes to come in your lives.”

And that’s exactly what graduate Roger Williams is confident he will make after completing the H-1B pipefitting course: a major change for the better. The Trinidad native led a rough life before immigrating to the United States, where he has earned his GED and also plans to pursue a bachelor’s degree after finding a position in the petrochemical industry.

“This program has been a life-changing experience and the perfect start,” Williams said. “I encourage and talk to everyone I know about it because it’s wonderful and it’s worth it.”