

An inside look at green jobs

Contractors show Central Oregon youths how it's done at jobs that are in demand

By Tim Doran / *The Bulletin*

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Tyler Roemer / *The Bulletin*

Michelle Ogle, 19, from YouthBuild, from left, Dave Bowman, 50, from GreenSavers USA, and AmeriCorps members Jessica Griffin, 18, and Stephen Nelson, 20, squeeze into a crawl space Thursday while Bowman shows them how to conduct an energy audit.



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Stephen Nelson, 20, left, and Jessica Griffin, 18, watch as Dave Bowman uses an infrared camera in an energy audit Thursday.

Find out more

For more information about the Heart of Oregon Corps, AmeriCorps or YouthBuild, visit www.heartoforegon.org.

Coming Monday

Learn more about green jobs and meet two solar heating and cooling installers in Green, Etc.

Three young adults — all members of AmeriCorps and YouthBuild — donned safety goggles and dust masks Thursday morning and descended into the crawl space of a southwest Bend home to get some on-the-green-job training.

The three were among nearly 30 from the organizations, which are overseen by the Heart of Oregon Corps, who joined about a dozen contractors at sites around Bend to learn about careers in sustainable, or environmentally friendly, construction, design, materials, renewable energy installation and energy efficiency.

All the contractors are members of Central Oregon Builders Association's Building Green Council.

While the economic crash decimated the construction industry — slashing the number of jobs in construction, logging and mining by more than 50 percent from 2006 to 2009 — workers in the industry with green building skills continue to be in demand, according to a state report.

At the home on Lodgepole Drive on Thursday, Dave Bowman, of GreenSavers USA, showed the students how to conduct an energy audit. Bowman, whose official title is energy efficiency expert, could more accurately be called a cold-air detective, searching out air leaks.

He started with a blower-door test, which depressurizes the house by using a fan inserted into a shroud in the front-door frame to suck all the air out.

In the search for leaks, Bowman led the students into the attic, as well as taking them into the crawl space. "I just want to show you the real world," he said.

Bowman shared the job's risks — encountering a black widow spider and a number of daddy longlegs — along with its rewards — helping a family with recent severe allergy problems when he discovered raccoons that had moved in to their crawl space.

He also showed them his tools of the trade.

Armed with an infrared camera, Bowman walked through the home, pointing the device all around, showing the students how the image in the monitor reddened to indicate heat and darkened for cold.

“It's like having a big ice cube sitting in your ceiling,” he said, as he pointed the camera up, showing them a dark area indicating cold air.

Conducting an energy audit is a dirty job, Bowman told the students, and not just because it requires crawling around. The materials used to seal cracks and stop leaks, mastic and expanding foam, can ruin clothing, he said.

Bowman said he normally wears a Tyvek suit and respirator during an audit. He said becoming certified to conduct energy audits required about six weeks of classes, field work and testing.

The students all said later that they learned a lot and found it interesting.

For two of them, AmeriCorps members Jessica Griffin, 18, and Stephen Nelson, 20, just being indoors meant quite a change in working conditions. They have been clearing brush in the woods for nearly 10 months. “It was nice to learn something new, something different,” Griffin said.

For homeowners, an audit can mean savings on energy costs, said Kendra Van Note, GreenSavers' community outreach and education representative. In one example, the audit and repairs reduced the energy bill by 33 percent, she said, and available cash rebates and tax credits brought a 45 percent savings on the repairs.

On Thursday afternoon, all the students and contractors from around Bend gathered for pizza, and the students shared what they learned. One had such a positive experience, he might be considered for an internship with one of the contractors, Van Note said.

“If just one kid makes that connection ... that's a huge success,” she said.

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