

New bricklaying program trains workers in high-demand trade

Angela Gismondi March 12, 2018



ANGELA GISMONDI — Jimmy Wu, a student of the Residential Bricklaying Program at the Skilled Trades College of Canada, works on his masonry skills. The free program, which kicked off its first eight-week term in January, is currently training 10 students for the high-demand trade of bricklaying.

Salah Dib, who came to Canada from Syria a year ago, will have a career in a high-demand trade in a few short months thanks to a new program aiming to educate and train workers in bricklaying,

“For newcomers like me who don’t have a high school diploma and don’t speak English very well it’s a good program,” said Dib, who worked in the construction industry in Syria. “It helps us to upgrade our skills. The important thing for me is that I will have a job after I finish this program.”

The Skilled Trades College of Canada (STCC) recently launched the Residential Bricklaying Program at its campus in Vaughan, Ont. Last March, the college started a plan of action and later created a curriculum. They also approached the government to get the program subsidized.

The eight-week course launched in January in a 3,000-square-foot lab space and classroom facilities.

The pilot includes 10 students, five of which are from Syria.

“There is a severe shortage of bricklayers in the industry,” explained Ralph Cerasuolo, director of the STCC, a private career college that has been around for 10 years.

“It’s affecting the productivity of homes being built in the GTA and so we’re lending a hand. There is a need in the industry and we’re bridging the gap,” said Cersasuolo.

The Residential Construction Council of Ontario (RESCON) urged the college to create the masonry program. According to RESCON, members are expressing frustration over the inability to get bricklayers on jobsites in the GTA.

“While everyone has been talking about the skills gap, this program will help to do something about it,” said **Andrew Pariser, vice-president of RESCON**. “Ten bricklayers is not going to solve our problem tomorrow, but it’s a good start. “They are going to have the basic skills and they’re going to be put in a situation where they’re able to succeed and that’s what’s important.”

Students are expected to be linked with a job upon graduation.

“The idea is to introduce them into an apprentice position with a masonry contractor,” explained Cerasuolo. “We have commitments from four large bricklaying contractors in the GTA for guaranteed jobs because they have a shortfall of manpower. The idea is to prep them and make them job ready so they can hold the job.”

The college hopes to graduate an additional 30 students by the end of the year and hopes to train and educate more than 200 per year by 2020. The program is funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, an Ontario government agency, in partnership with Human Endeavour, a Vaughan-based non-profit dedicated to providing opportunities to residents and new immigrants.

Student Jimmy Wu said he has always been interested in learning bricklaying but it's not something you pick up on the jobsite. It's necessary to have a strong foundation in the trade, he said.

"I want to get adequate preparation from the program and once the eight weeks is finished, I will be able to show up on a jobsite and actually be able to contribute and produce," said Wu. "Once they see that you have potential, that's the most important thing. They're willing to invest in you and teach you."

Mike Di Donato, operations manager at the college, said the program was designed with input from a variety of different contractors who informed the college what they need from new apprentices.

"It was invaluable to us because we're not bricklayers so we did a lot of interviews with a lot of different contractors just trying to find out what they need," said Di Donato. "If the students are not meeting the needs of the contractor when the program is finished then the program is dead in the water because we're not preparing quality graduates and quality employees."

The importance of trowel skills was essential for most contractors and the college responded by making that a main focus of the program.

"The contractors said to us very clearly, if they can't work a trowel, they're no good to us," explained Di Donato. "As long as they're good with the trowel, they're valuable and can be taught the bricklaying."



ANGELA GISMONDI — Salah Dib is one of the students enrolled in the two-month Residential Bricklaying Program at the Skilled Trades College of Canada in Vaughan, Ont. Dib, who came to Canada from Syria a year ago, said the program will give him the skills to start a career in the trade.

Pariser said retaining these individuals is as important as training.

“It’s great to train 10 people but its even better when those people get jobs and six months or six years from now are still in the industry,” he noted.