

San Juan EDC Wraps up 2019 Trades Courses

After the success of the San Juan County Economic Development Council's previous trades training courses and a tremendous need in our community for trained building tradespeople, they worked to create a large-scale, in-depth building program that would offer training to new and underemployed workers.



The San Juan County Economic Development Council (EDC) was profoundly grateful to receive grants from the Washington State Governor's Strategic Reserve Fund, the Washington State Department of Commerce, San Juan County, the Port of Friday Harbor, the Town of Friday Harbor, the San Juan Island Community Foundation, the Orcas Island Community Foundation, Islanders Bank, Heritage Bank, Eastsound Water Users Association and other local organizations, individuals and businesses in order to offer trades courses in 2019.

Thanks to this support, the EDC presented courses in Construction Basics, Plumbing Basics, Electrical Basics, HVAC Basics, Low Voltage/Fiber Optics, Construction Welding, and, in partnership with the Eastsound Water Users Association, Water System Operations training. The

EDC has been proud to partner with local high schools, Skagit Valley College, local businesses and contractors to offer these courses.

The EDC's Construction Basics course on San Juan Island, taught by Mike Murphy of Raven Hill Construction, finished strong with help from a Washington State Governor's Strategic Reserve Fund grant and the Washington State Department of Commerce. Students were able to complete scaled-down models of houses, a project that taught essential construction concepts and techniques.

In the spring of 2019, the EDC offered Plumbing Basics on both San Juan and Orcas Islands. These courses took place at the Orcas Island High School, with Jeff Morris and Brett McFarland instructing, and Friday Harbor High School, with Brent Huntington instructing. Both courses focused on introducing the in-demand field of plumbing to new and interested high school students and career changers. Each class included hands-on techniques such as soldering and gluing, and the Orcas Island course included the design and construction of a model bathroom which students were able to fully plumb with sink and toilet fixtures. 17 students enrolled for both each plumbing course, and all expressed high satisfaction with the program.

Offered next at the Friday Harbor High School STEM Center was a comprehensive introduction to concepts in heating, ventilation and air conditioning, centered on the construction of a working heat pump. The course was taught by Kevin McCullough, owner of San Juan Heating. 11 students enrolled in the course, all of whom were working in adjacent construction fields and looking to specialize, or were currently employed as a trainee in this field, or were looking to get into this field for the first time.



The first Trades

Education Initiative offered on Lopez Island was Construction Basics, taught by Paul Henriksen. It was held at the Lopez Island School shop, in collaboration with the Lopez Community Land Trust, which donated materials for the project. The course centered on the construction of an 8x10' shed to be used by the Land Trust, and it was a great success.

Next on the schedule for San Juan Island was Low Voltage/Fiber Optic, presented in conjunction with Rock Island Communications, and taught by staff from their office. The class served as a comprehensive introduction to Low Voltage and Fiber Optic wiring, covering everything from underground cabling, to fiber splicing, to home installation. It was held at the Friday Harbor High School STEM Center.

Following that program was a partnership between the EDC and Skagit Valley College (SVC) to offer free training in Construction Welding basics at SVC's Mount Vernon campus for 6 weeks from May-June. The class, taught by SVC instructor Victor Case, was at capacity with 11 students – all of whom were from San Juan County. Because no formal welding program or facility exists in the San Juan Islands, students were transported to SVC's Mount Vernon Campus. The class covered shielded metal arc welding and offered 2 college credits to those who completed the course.

In Fall of 2020 the EDC, in conjunction with Eastsound Water Users Association, ran a Water Systems Operations course on Orcas Island that enrolled 12 students, three of whom have already been hired into this high-demand trade. This course lasted six weeks and included units

on water quality testing, water system mathematics, and field trips to a variety of Orcas water systems.



Currently wrapping up is a six-week Electrical Basics course on San Juan Island, taught by Brent Huntington, which has enrolled 14 students and is covering basic electrical concepts, mathematics, regulations, and hands-on wiring projects. Also running this fall and winter is Tree Worker Basics, taught on Orcas Island by Carson Sprenger of Rain Shadow Consulting. The course has 17 enrolled students and covers tree health, knots and rigging for tree climbing, chainsaw maintenance, arborist certification, and other information relating to that career.

In addition to grant funding directed toward these courses, the EDC's ongoing Trades Education Initiative is supported by San Juan County, the Town of Friday Harbor, the Port of Friday Harbor, the Lopez, Orcas, and San Juan Island School Districts, the San Juan Island Community Foundation, the Orcas Island Community Foundation, Islanders Bank, Heritage Bank and other local organizations, individuals and businesses including Walt Corbin, the Kiwanis Club of Orcas Island, Browne's Home Center, Ace Hardware, Browne's Heating, Ravenhill Construction, San Juan Propane, Green Man Landscape & Design, and many more.

"The EDC could not have offered these courses without the strong support we received from our funders and within the community. We are profoundly grateful for islanders' generosity – and we are deeply inspired by the hard work of our students and the motivation of our instructors," noted EDC Executive Director Victoria Compton.

The EDC has many programs scheduled for 2020, including an Advanced Plumbing course, a Healthcare Careers Fair, a Creative Careers Fair, a management training course geared towards those working in hospitality, building trades and other industries, and courses in our schools.

The San Juan County Economic Development Council (EDC) strives to strengthen and diversify the economy of San Juan County. We believe a strong economy builds a strong community.

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