New program offers $4,000 to adults who return to classroom

A new program offers up to $4,000 for qualifying adults in 11 Missouri counties who want to further their education or complete a degree.

“Jump Start Your Future” is a partnership of the Northeast Missouri Workforce Development Board, Connections to Success and NECAC.

The deadline to register is Oct. 31. Applicants must be 18 or older and meet income guidelines. Those who receive food stamps, have gotten unemployment payments in the past or are currently displaced from a job automatically qualify.

The program covers Lewis, Lincoln, Macon, Marion, Monroe, Montgomery, Pike, Ralls, Randolph, Shelby and Warren. Additional assistance and client monitoring will be available.

“The importance of this partnership is that we’ll be providing follow-up services,” said Northeast Missouri Workforce Development Board Executive Director Diane Simbro. “We’re going to follow up to make sure they have what they need to be successful.”

“Jump Start Your Future will provide determined individuals with the skills and resources necessary to achieve economic stability and create successful futures for themselves and their families,” said Connections to Success Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer Kathy Lambert. “We’re putting their dreams into action.”

Please see New program, Page 2

Aspire small homes program kicks off

One-bedroom homes built by jail inmates will be sold for around $37,000 in Missouri, Illinois and Iowa as part of an initiative announced July 9.

The Aspire Partnership Small Homes program is an effort of NECAC, the Lincoln County Sheriff’s Department and the St. Louis Carpenters Joint Apprenticeship Program.

It was developed by NECAC, and is modeled after a similar project in South Dakota. Lincoln County Jail inmates will build 612-square-foot houses with instruction from the Carpenters union.

“This project has been planned for more than a decade, and today we are proud to take part in its implementation,” said NECAC President and Chief Executive Officer Don Patrick. “As housing needs change, many of our communities are looking for cost-effective, energy-efficient houses that will meet the needs of younger buyers, retirees and single people. Small homes will be a perfect match.”

Please see Aspire, Page 2
Aspire Partnership Small Homes program gets under way
Continued from Page 1

NECAC President and CEO Don Patrick

Lincoln County Sheriff John Cottle

Carpenters Program Coordinator R.J. Catizon

“Any break in recidivism is not only an immediate win for our community, but also a win for future generations to come,” said Lincoln County Sheriff John Cottle. “One person that is able to break the cycle allows a ripple effect that can extend to future generations of their family and our community.”

“This is a great example of a win-win,” said R.J. Catizon, outreach specialist/intake coordinator for the St. Louis Carpenters Joint Apprenticeship Program. “Persons under supervision are learning valuable skills that will help them find employment in the construction industry upon release, while people in need are getting affordable housing that is increasingly in short supply. The St. Louis-Kansas City Carpenters Regional Council recognizes unique and innovative programs such as this.”

Residents of Missouri, Illinois and Iowa may purchase the homes through NECAC. Buyers must work with the agency to secure a loan or get one on their own. Financial assistance through the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s 502 Direct Loan Program may be available.

The $37,000 cost does not include land, transportation from the jail to the home site or a foundation. Buyers must have a lot that is locally zoned for a small home and pay any utility or sight- ing costs.

The houses will be built at the Lincoln County Jail’s Inmate Training Center, which Sheriff Cottle opened in 2019 with the goal of reducing recidivism and providing prisoners with workforce skills they can use to get a job upon release. In the past, the volunteer inmates have worked with non-profit organizations and completed several local projects.

The sheriff’s department will use the International Brotherhood of Carpenters Career Connections Carpenter curriculum in training the inmates, who will receive classroom and hands-on instruction. Upon completion, inmates will have an opportunity to receive an industry recognized credential, which is a state or federally-approved designation awarded to someone who has shown proficiencies in technical skills associated with the program. A participant that receives a Career Connections credential through the state and the Carpenters’ Apprenticeship Program will be eligible for two units of credit upon entrance to any apprenticeship program in Missouri, Illinois and Kansas.

NECAC also received a two-year, $70,000 grant from the Local Initiative Support Corporation for administration of the program. The agency was one of only four recipients nationwide to receive LISC Safety and Justice funding.

“This program has been a long time coming and we’re glad to get it going,” said NECAC Deputy Director for Housing Development Programs Carla Potts, who designed the program. “Residents will have a new, energy-efficient home, the inmates will receive instruction in a trade they can use to get a job once released and communities will benefit over time as more people move in.”

Potts said NECAC eventually hopes to expand the program to another correctional facility in Missouri, where two-bedroom and three-bedroom homes would be built by inmates.
‘When you love your job, you never really go to work.’
Judy Eaton leaves with good memories that outweigh the bad, the soggy and the windy.

Judy Eaton loved helping others, be it cleanup from one of the worst disasters in local history to making sure hundreds of children had presents at Christmas.

The NECAC Lewis County Service Coordinator retired Aug. 7 after almost 27 years with the agency.

“When you love your job, you never really go to work,” Eaton said. “In all the time I’ve been here, I’ve never had to go to work. I loved what I did and I love Lewis County. There were some tough times, but it all worked out.”

Judy grew up on a farm with five siblings just four miles from where she and her husband, Randy, now live southwest of Canton.

“We didn’t have much growing up, so you appreciated anything you got,” she said. “At Christmas, you got one item of clothing and one toy.”

Judy earned a bachelor’s degree in elementary education from Northwest Missouri State, now Truman University. She was an educator and worked for the Missouri Division of Family Services before joining NECAC on Sept. 16, 1993 — just as the Midwest began recovering from the greatest flood in its history. Two months earlier, the Mississippi River had crested at its highest level. The levee protecting Canton held, but other parts of Lewis County were not as fortunate.

“There was damage from the north end of the county to the south end — total devastation,” Judy said. “I remember we just had an office full of people. It was a mess. I was so green. There were folks that needed everything from food to clothes to housing. I learned quickly.”

Recovery continued for more than a year, and Judy remembers traveling to area cities to buy supplies for flood victims, some of whom were living in campers because their homes had been destroyed.

Disaster literally struck home on May 10, 2003. Judy remembers it was a warmer-than-normal Saturday afternoon. She noticed the family’s three horses were acting strangely and looked up at the sky as a sudden stillness enveloped her farm.

“All of the clouds were collapsing together,” Judy recalls. “I didn’t see a funnel cloud, I saw a steamroller.”

The twister pulled an optical illusion. The sky didn’t darken because the tornado had inhaled white dust from gravel roads in the area. Judy, her husband, Randy, and their teenage son, Jeffrey, got to the basement just as the tornado paid its unwelcome visit.

“It shook the house so hard,” she said. “The noise was just horrible.”

So loud, in fact, that Judy couldn’t hear her son screaming, even though she was on top of him to cover his body from debris. Judy and Jeffrey escaped without injury, but a nail was impaled in Randy’s chest. Luckily, the wound was not serious.

In addition to tearing the roof off the house, the tornado destroyed every vehicle the family owned. A magnificent hackberry tree that had survived for more than two centuries was ripped out by the roots.

More than 90 Lewis County families were directly affected by the storm.

“We’re just lucky that no one was killed,” Judy said.

One idea Judy brought with her from the Division of Family Services is still going strongly more than a quarter-century later. The Adopt-A-Child Program provides Christmas gifts to more than 300 Lewis County kids and gift certificates for hams to 90 families. It’s earned Judy the title of “The Ho-Ho of Lewis County.”

“They’re so tickled when they get nice bags of gifts,” says Judy, who plans to continue with other volunteers who make up the effort. “‘The ‘Ho-Ho’ don’t mess around.”

Judy also helped start the Lewis County Food Pantry three years ago after a local church discontinued its program. The pantry serves more than 250 families a month.

“It just goes to show you the need is there and it’s growing,” she said.

At 62, Judy is not ready to fully call it quits. She’s returning to the classroom as a paraprofessional in special education with the Canton school district. In addition to Jeffrey, now 33, Judy and Randy have two other children — 38-year-old Les and 37-year-old Julie — and three grandchildren. The couple celebrated 40 years of marriage on Aug. 2. Judy hopes to do some traveling and plans to put her sewing skills to use in quilting.

“I’ve always wanted to quilt,” she said. “I’ve already got a lot of my materials bought, so I’m ready to go.”
Antoniou offers food pantry for needy in Warren County

What started as a spontaneous reaction to a need has grown into a lifeline for the destitute.

NECAC is providing a limited amount of free foods from its Warren County Service Center.

The program started in June, when NECAC Warren County Service Coordinator Desiree Antoniou began distributing to the homeless five frozen meals she gets each week from a local volunteer. In July, she began offering canned soups, vegetables, beans, bags of rice and packaged foods inside her office.

“The word is spreading and it’s going really well,” Antoniou said. “There is a need. I’ve seen people I’ve never seen before. It’s really helping them out.”

People may eat their meals at the service center or take it with them. She’s put two chairs in front of the building and two more inside to accommodate. In accordance with social distancing and COVID-19 health guidelines, the chairs are cleaned after each use. If NECAC is unable to provide assistance, referrals are made to other agencies that may offer help. The food program is intended as a supplement to other local efforts. Contributions will be the key to sustaining the giveaway, and Antoniou says people have been generous. “If we can do one more thing to help people get through, then that’s great.”

Roberts seeks more housing options for Pike County

NECAC Pike County Service Coordinator Chandra Roberts hopes a discussion of ways to offer more housing options will lead to results.

She’s seeking ideas from residents, businesses and local organizations. Roberts spoke to the Louisiana City Council Aug. 24. The goal is to address what NECAC clients and others have said is a lack of adequate housing, especially for many who live paycheck-to-paycheck and victims of domestic abuse.

“I don’t care if it’s positive or negative, I need suggestions,” Roberts said. “Sometimes, I can make something positive out of it. Any insight is better than none. Bring it.”

Roberts hopes to see more lease-to-own and transitional housing developed, or conversions of older buildings to lofts.

“We need investors,” she said. “We need people who want to invest back into the communities.”