



In the News

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More National Attention



Apprenticeship program lauded

The U.S. Department of Labor on July 12 recognized a job training apprenticeship program developed by the North East Community Action Corporation. Six graduates from the agency's weatherization program were presented with certificates and three others were recognized for achieving energy auditor status. Pictured seated, from left, are NECAC Weatherization Director Eric Benn; U.S. Department of Labor Apprenticeship and Training Representative Jeanna Caldwell; NECAC Weatherization Director Brittany Wasson; NECAC Deputy Director for Housing Development Programs Carla Potts; NECAC President and Chief Executive Officer Dan Page; and Missouri Department of Natural Resources State Technical Weatherization Supervisor Dan McDowell. Pictured standing with certificates, from left, are NECAC's Brandon Warren, Zaqry Uplinger, Brenden Henderson, Jacob Niffen, Andy Mackey, Jacob Schler, James Patrick, Clinton Caldwell and Tom Branham. Pictured in back at right are NECAC Board Members Tommy Wallace and Curt Mitchell, and Bowling Green Mayor Jim Arico. **Please see story on Page 2.**

NECAC apprenticeship program marks milestone



Jeanna Caldwell
U.S. Department of Labor



Dan McDowell
Missouri Dept. of Natural Resources



Dan Page
NECAC President & CEO

A job training program developed by NECAC has gotten additional recognition from the federal government.

Jeanna Caldwell of the U.S. Department of Labor presented certificates July 12 to six new graduates of the NECAC apprenticeship program.

Three other NECAC team members were recognized for achieving energy auditor status. Caldwell called the program a success.

“We believe that the earn and learn method of registered apprenticeship is the premier way to be able to learn as you need to be successful in the workforce, and we are very appreciative of this program,” said Caldwell, DOL Apprenticeship and Training Representative. “We’re looking forward to working with NECAC to be able to develop new programs in in-demand programs.”

“We went from two gradu-

ates last year to nine this year, which speaks well to not only our graduates but to the weatherization directors and supervisors who mentored them in the areas of responsibility this program covers to ensure they had the knowledge and skills expected of a graduate,” said NECAC President and Chief Executive Officer Dan Page. “It also speaks well as an acknowledgement of the program’s worth. They, like you and I, are not going to invest an entire year of our lives to reach a goal unless it means something, and this program means something.”

Dan McDowell, state technical weatherization supervisor for the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, has experience with apprenticeships and said the program offers graduates endless job opportunities.

“The energy sector is the

fastest growing sector nationwide,” McDowell said. “You guys have chosen a really good time to make that commitment and take the step through being in the apprenticeship program and now graduating to a huge career opportunity and path that will take you essentially anywhere you want to go.”

The new apprenticeship graduates are Brandon Warren, Brenden Henderson, Andrew Mackey, Zaqry Uplinger, Jacob Niffen and Jacob Schler. Receiving certificates as energy auditors were James Patrick, Clintan Caldwell and Tom Branham.

Others attending the ceremony were NECAC Deputy Director for Housing Development Programs Carla Potts, Pike County Commissioner and NECAC Pike County Board Member Tommy Wallace of Louisiana; NECAC Pike County Board Member

Curt Mitchell of Clarksville; Bowling Green Mayor Jim Arico; and NECAC Weatherization Directors Eric Benn and Brittany Wasson.

The apprenticeship program was developed by NECAC in partnership with the U.S. Department of Labor, Missouri Department of Labor, Northeast Missouri Workforce Development Board and Pike-Lincoln Technical Center.

The goal is to provide newly-hired weatherization employees with skills that will allow them to work in a variety of job fields.

The NECAC effort began in March 2021. The program consists of 144 hours of classroom learning and 2,000 hours of on-the-job education. Upon completion, participants earn a Department of Labor certification as a home performance laborer. NECAC showcases the apprenticeship as a model for weatherization.



Employee Spotlight:

Housing counselor empathizes with clients



Amirault

David Amirault isn’t satisfied with going through the motions.

The longtime NECAC Housing Counselor qualifies people for the Section 8 housing program and works with landlords and renters.

Through it all, he remains dedicated to making sure clients have a safe place to call home. Amirault remembers a wintertime call from a woman who had no heat.

“She was wrapped in blankets sitting on her couch,” he recalls. “Her landlord was like ‘Yeah, I’ll be over there later.’ I said ‘Don’t bother. We’ll terminate you from the program.’ We had her in another apartment that night.”

The Massachusetts native moved to Missouri with his family in 2003, and began working at NECAC three years later. Amirault says the toughest part is dealing with violations that are found. He’ll often refer clients to other agency assistance programs. “We do what we can,” he said. “When you can tangibly help someone, that’s the best part of the job.”

Amirault and his late wife, Dale, have four grown children and a grandchild. Despite the occasional downside, he enjoys his job.

“I like the people I work with,” he said. “We look at it together as we’re all pulling the same rope. That’s a good environment to work in.”

Needs assessment puts focus upon critical topics



Wasson

A survey shows affordable housing, living-wage jobs and food security are top priorities in NECAC's 12 counties.

The Community Needs Assessment was done between Jan. 1 and June 30. More than 700 people answered online questions or attended in-person focus groups. The next step is to put together a plan aimed at offering solutions, a process expected to take several months.

"We'll look at these needs and figure out how we can address them," said NECAC's Kayla Wasson, who oversaw the assessment. "We'll look at partnerships with other organizations to close gaps in services and other ways we can help people in our communities."

Assessment respondents pointed to what they called a critical

need for affordable housing, with many homebuyers priced out of the market. Financial concerns also were on the minds of those who said there aren't enough living-wage jobs, especially for families. With inflation and a troubled economy, participants also were worried about food security.

NECAC already has programs that can help, but Wasson said it's more critical than ever to find new ways of boosting the economic potential of the region.

NECAC conducts the survey every three years as part of its requirements to receive federal and state funding for social service, community health and public housing programs. Past questionnaires led to creation of food pantries at NECAC service centers, a diaper distribution program and an employment readiness service.

Topics addressed this year included employment, education, housing and transportation. Copies of the full assessment are available at www.necac.org.

Class offers a recipe for practical savings lessons

Carolyn Martinez has found a handy way to cut down on food costs.

The Pike County woman enrolled in a dehydrating class sponsored by NECAC. It's just one of many life-skills classes offered by the agency.

"I've got a garden going and I'm ready to have some vegetables," Martinez said. "I'm going to try. I'm going to do good. We've got a good class here. Everyone is wonderful."

Rising food prices have led many people to look for ways to save money. One alternative is to grow or preserve vegetables and fruit.

NECAC's free one-day class for income-qualifying participants offered lessons on dehydrating apples and potatoes to make chips.

"It enables them to have more food that's sustainable and to cut down on costs," said NECAC Pike County Service Coordinator Penny Dixon. "You can buy more fresh vegetables in the summertime than you can in the wintertime. It really helps."

Martinez was unfamiliar with the dehydrating process. After slicing a potato, she blanched the chips for four minutes in hot water, then shocked them for a minute in cold water. The chips were arranged on a tray and put into the dehydrator at 131 degrees. Completion takes six to 10 hours, depending upon the thickness of the chips.

As an added bonus, each participant received a dehydrator to take home. NECAC Shelby County Service Coordinator Lisa Blickhan began the program this spring with 45 units and says there are about 15 left. She will teach the class in other counties upon request.

"We're very appreciative of what NECAC does and the peo-



By Brent Engel, Public Relations Officer

Carolyn Martinez removes potato chips from a dehydrator.

ple who come and teach us different things and how to save money," said another class member, Tammy Perez.

"It's a win-win for them," Blickhan said. "The families will be able to make their own food and cut down on their grocery bills."

Other life-skills classes offered by NECAC include gardening, healthy eating on a budget, canning, home safety, energy savings, stress management, fraud awareness and realistic renting.

The program is funded in whole or part with \$3,000 of federal funds received from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Community Services Block Grant, as provided by the Missouri Department of Social Services, Family Support Division.

Dunker honored as 'Hero'

It came as a surprise, which made the honor all the more better.

NECAC Ralls County Service Coordinator Stephanie Dunker on July 26 received the "Hometown Heroes" award from KHQA TV of Quincy.

The station picked Dunker for the monthly award for revitalizing the food pantry operated from the service center in New London. She was nominated by United Way of the Mark Twain Area Executive Director Denise Damron. Dunker re-opened the pantry in December 2021, shortly after joining NECAC. She was humbled, grateful and, in typical fashion, modest.

"I think it's just what humans should be doing for each other," Dunker said. "I feel really blessed to work here and blessed to serve the community."



By Brent Engel, Public Relations Officer

Ralls County Service Coordinator Stephanie Dunker clutches her "Hometown Heroes" award as she's interviewed by KHQA TV's Zach Richardson, a Pike County native.



NECAC attendees at the Missouri Community Action Network annual conference in St. Charles included, from left, Penny Dixon, Janice Allan, Laura Mabry, Carey Westerman, Kayla Wasson, Carrie Dina, Kathy Block, Karen Ford and Dan Page. Not pictured is Carla Potts.

School supplies offered

NECAC once again sponsored or helped with school supply programs. Following are a few:



Lewis County Coordinator Gena Scott handed out dozens of book bags.



Macon County Coordinator Terri Laughlin offered 600 crayons and other items.

NECAC part of state conference

NECAC was part of the statewide Missouri Community Action Network conference June 21 to 23 in St. Charles.

Attending were President and Chief Executive Officer Dan Page; Board Chairman Mike Bridgins and Board Vice-Chairman Glenn Eagan; Deputy Director for Housing Development Programs Carla Potts; Community Services Block Grant Director Kayla Wasson; Management Information Systems Administrator Kathy Block; County Service Coordinators Janice Allan, Laura Mabry, Penny Dixon and Carrie Dina; and Intake Assistants Carey Westerman and Karen Ford.

Topics of sessions included workforce development, enhancing customer satisfaction, management and strategic planning, cultural competence and engaging community leaders.

Potts spoke to attendees about a NECAC job apprenticeship program to teach new hires a variety of construction skills through the agency's weatherization program.



Pike County Coordinator Penny Dixon received a \$500 check to purchase back-to-school items from Charlie Wright and the Rev. M. Faye Vaughn of the Northeast Missouri Clergy Coalition.



Food boxes delivered

Thirty Pike County families each received 20 pounds of fresh produce July 11. The program was a partnership between NECAC, Families and Communities Together, USDA, the Missouri Department of Social Services and the Local Food Purchase Assistance cooperative. Pictured unloading boxes, from left, are NECAC Pike County Service Coordinator Penny Dixon, New Hartford Baptist Church pastor the Rev. Jim Craig and his daughter, Madison.



Cooler clients

Macon County Coordinator Terri Laughlin with air conditioners that were donated by Macon Electric Cooperative to customers in Macon and Shelby counties.



Mike Bridgins,
Chairman of the Board



Dan Page,
President & CEO

