

Life for residents of Sonoma County changed drastically on the evening of October 8, 2017. The fires that swept through the region were some of the deadliest in California history disrupting hundreds of businesses, and impacting the lives of countless residents – especially those most economically and socially vulnerable. In Sonoma County, the wildfires burned 110,720 acres, destroyed 5,319 homes, 1,100 nonresidential structures, and approximately 600 businesses. A Housing and Fiscal Impact Report prepared by Beacon Economics estimated that Sonoma County needs to construct at least 30,000 housing units over the next five years to account for employment growth, fire losses, and overcrowding.

In response to this need, the Sonoma County Adult Education Consortium started an Introduction to Construction and Trades training program in January 2018. The course offered through the Sonoma County Office of Education (SCOE) is sixty hours and feeds into the Construction and Trades Non-Credit Certificate Program offered through Santa Rosa Junior College (SRJC). The program has also started to address the annual gap in trained workforce of approximately 3,500 workers that has emerged over the past eight years.

Training in the certificate programs through SRJC will focus on current, relevant industry practices such as green building, natural building, pre-fabrication, and large-scale production through manufacturing in order to minimize waste and environmental impact during the building process, as well as emphasize economy of scale for multiple dwelling projects. According to an article in Forbes magazine from June 12, 2016, Mike Kavis states, “The rates of innovation in a number of technologies have enabled pioneers in the construction industry to leverage technology to radically change business models for erecting large buildings and structures. Drones, big data, machine learning, 3D printing and robotics are some of the key enabling technologies leading the disruption.” By adopting Kavis’ examples of manufacturing practices in Sonoma County’s own construction & trades training certificates, we can better equip trainees for twenty-first century jobs in the sector, as well as streamlining construction processes to make rebuilding more efficient. The landscaping courses will include native plants, fire resistant plants, low-water use plants and non-plant materials, as well soil and water system repair techniques.

One of the partnerships that is having a positive impact on local residents and in particular the immigrant workforce is the training program in Sonoma Valley. Classes are held at the Hannah Boys Center in Sonoma with instruction provided by SCOE using local licensed general contractors. The La Luz Center of Sonoma provides wrap around support services by assigning a case manager to work with students through every step of the program from recruitment to completion. La Luz also provides vouchers for tools/boots and a stipend to each completer, courtesy of a grant from Tipping Point. Bilingual staff members and instructional assistants attend the classes to ensure that language is not a barrier to success. The third cohort for the program is scheduled to begin in mid-September. So far forty-five students have completed the training course.

Students can continue on to certificate classes offered free of charge through SRJC, which include Introduction to Plan Reading for Building Trades, Construction Math, and OSHA 10 or 30. Students are also encouraged to continue English Language development through ESL courses offered at a local elementary school.

A recent article in the Press Democrat (August, 2018) by Hannah Beausang highlights just how meaningful this program is to the community. “Tears threatened to spill from the 57-year-old’s eyes as she spoke of the fires’ impact on the community she’s called home for 20 years. ‘These classes are very

important,' said [Maria] Ordonez, whose home was not damaged. 'We need so much help. We are learning and we have to encourage our community to be helpful. The county gave us the tools to work with so we have the knowledge to repair houses that burned.'"

The Sonoma County Adult Education Consortium also runs classes in Santa Rosa through 180 Studios, a Maker-Space facility for the community. It is anticipated that up to 150 students will complete the introductory class through SCOE by the end of the year.

Link to article by Hannah Beausang in Press Democrat from August 2, 2018.

<https://www.pressdemocrat.com/news/8560879-181/shortage-of-construction-workers-to>

[hannah.beausang@pressdemocrat.com](mailto:hannah.beausang@pressdemocrat.com)