

## MOHAVE-LA PAZ WORKFORCE INVESTMENT AREA

**WORKFORCE NEWS**

## GETTING OFF THE FAST TRACK

### FAST TRACK STUDENTS GRADUATE

Last September, Mohave County and REPAC Consortium partnered with Mohave Community College to offer their clients fast-track training programs for in-demand fields. Eight months later, those clients received their diplomas.

Fast-track is a federally funded program that offers certifications in medical assisting, medical billing/coding, CNA (certified nursing assistant), and HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning). In total, 85 students completed the program.

"This has been a great partnership with the One-Stop," said MCC Academic Chair Curt Clough. "We've had a lot of positive feedback from the community and from the people who were involved. We're going to have some very qualified workers going out into the workforce and filling those positions."

Some of the positions have already been filled. Jonathan Mowery, along with many of the HVAC graduates, started work right away. Mowery's case manager, REPAC Representative Kim Gissendanner, is proud of the results, because this was "the first time we'd fit long-term training into such a short time period."

Not only were classes condensed, but the registration process was hurried along, too. "We put over 100 people into training within 30 days of meeting them," said Mohave County One-Stop Coordinator Seth Dyson.

Within those 30 days, each participant had to be screened and assessed, and the right paperwork had to be filed. Once they were enrolled, Mohave County and REPAC paid for tuition and any relevant expenses.

"We're able to provide that wraparound service that other students don't have access to," Dyson said.

As a result, the majority of fast-track students finished the program and received their industry-recognized certificates.

The certificates are only as important as the skills learned, and responses from professors and the public show that these graduates know what they're doing.

In particular, local allied health offices are "very pleased with the quality of students that are currently finishing their externships there," noted Andra Goldberg, MCC's career and technical education coordinator.

"I feel confident sending myself and my family to these folks," said Dyson, "because they've proven themselves."



*Darick Bernier poses with his family right after graduating with an HVAC certificate. His Mohave County Program Representative, Brian Sigler, is pleased with how the HVAC program turned out. "I'm happy with the efforts they've all put out and their tenacity to overcome hardships," he said.*

# GRADUATION DAY

In a triumph of spirit over circumstance, Mohave County's Fast-Track students graduate to better lives.



Lori Witherite, stops traffic to take photos with her new diploma. Lori received her GED in March and has since moved on to college classes. "Math was really tough for me," she said. "I would see an algebra problem and just start panicking. Thanks to the GED preparation classes, I've been able to overcome that. This graduation is a really exciting time for me."



Joshua Wyatt is surrounded by family and friends as he accepts his Associate's degree in Chemical Dependency Studies. His education was entirely funded by REPAC Consortium. "My wife told me about REPAC," Joshua said. "Everything just worked out." (For more information on Joshua, see page 3.)



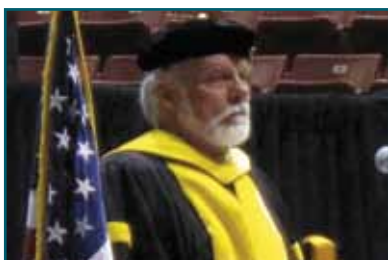
On April 27, Matt Cooper accepted a position as Medical Office Coordinator at Northwest Cardiothoracic and Vascular Specialists. He began his new job in June and since then he has passed the AMT Certification.



MCC administrators and professors watch as over 600 students receive their diplomas. Nearly 100 of them were assisted by Mohave County One-Stop Career Center and REPAC.



Mohave County One-Stop Coordinator Seth Dyson and Mohave County Teacher Evan Purcell pose with mother/daughter graduates Carlaina Fernandez (left) and Cynthia Buckley. Both students earned certificates in Medical Billing/Coding and Carlaina received a certificate in Medical Assisting. "They were extremely motivated students," said Purcell, who tutored them in math. "I'm excited to see what lies ahead for them."



Dr. Tom McKinney delivers the 2010 commencement speech, the first time in MCC history that a faculty member was the commencement speaker. He gave the graduates the following advice: "I hope you don't leave here and find a job. I hope you leave here and find work. Work is something you have a passion for. Go out there and work."



Photographs above by Craig Stacey, Camera Works Photography  
Robert Leisz (left) and Alan Bensley each receive their residential HVAC certificates from MCC President Michael Kearns. Leisz and Bensley, both Lake Havasu City residents, are among the 23 students who successfully completed the HVAC Fast-Track program in Mohave County.



# MOHAVE COUNTY HELPS FILL PRODUCTION JOBS



*Cascades Product Managers Frederic Martel and Therese Haase gather with Business Services Representative Mary Mendola (center)*

On June 1, Suvada Operta started working at Cascades Tissue Group, a manufacturing plant specializing in recycled paper products. This is the first job in over a year for the Bosnian refugee, and the perfect way to renew her faith in her adopted country. "I never gave up hope," she said, "no matter how hard things got."

Suvada is one of seven utility employees Cascades has hired since March. She went through two rounds of assessments and one interview, all facilitated by the Mohave County One-Stop Career Center.

Cascades has partnered with the One-Stop, said Mohave County Business Representative Mary Mendola. "We give basic information about the jobs available; then we proctor the assessments. So far we've assessed 104. The plan is to continue until all the Cascades positions are filled."

The partnership is a vital step toward ensuring that the company finds the right people. "The services we've been getting from the One-Stop have been extremely helpful," Cascades Production Manager Frederic Martel said. "This feels like an underutilized resource."

By teaming with Mohave County, Cascades is able to deal with a large number of workers applying for a limited amount of jobs.

"Cascades is hiring a number of positions with benefits and a good wage," Mendola said. "It's a bright spot in the Kingman economy."

The assessments measure specific traits like safety skills, dependability, and teamwork, she said.

"They have to be picky about who they hire," says Mike Beachler, a utility employee with Cascades. "They use a tough assessment process."



*Suvada Operta*

For people like Operta, though, none of that matters. What matters is that she's found steady employment at a time when high-paying jobs are scarce. "This is not the job I had expected," she said, "but I am honored to have been chosen and I will do my best."



## FACES

**Joshua Wyatt**

**REPAC - Kingman - Mohave County**

The morning after Joshua Wyatt graduated from MCC with an Associate's in Chemical Dependency Studies, he hiked through the Grand Canyon. "It was more beautiful than I imagined. I've lived in Arizona 20 years, and that was my first time up there," he said.

It wasn't his only first. Not only did Joshua graduate with honors, but that same week, he and his wife adopted their fourteen-year-old nephew. "This is truly a new chapter in my life," he said.

Thanks to good grades and his acceptance into the Phi Theta Kappa academic fraternity, Joshua has gotten several colleges interested in recruiting him.

"In high school, I was classified as special ed. It hurt my self-esteem and made college seem very intimidating. Now I'm graduating with honors," he said.

While he's excited about his academic future, he admits to being nervous. "Honestly, I'm still intimidated," he said, "but if I use fear as an excuse not to continue my education, I only fail myself."

So far, Joshua has done anything but fail. He saw Phi Theta Kappa posters around campus, which served as constant encouragement. After three years, he graduated with a 3.85 GPA.

In order to finish his degree, he must commit to another two years of schooling.

Through this process, he has been helped along by REPAC Consortium. REPAC, a program that retrains laid-off workers, took "a big chance on me," he said. "I wouldn't be here if they weren't willing to guide and support me."

Eventually, Joshua wants to work as a counselor in the Kingman area. He believes that chemical dependency therapy is his calling. "It's not just about a job," he said. "It's about a purpose. This is my purpose."

*"IN THESE LAST THREE YEARS, I LEARNED MORE THAN JUST ACADEMICS. I LEARNED WHO I AM AND WHAT I'M CAPABLE OF."*



# FACES

**Nikki Amidan**  
**Parker - La Paz County**

Nikki Amidan knew she wanted to be in the medical field after taking care of her ailing grandfather. "It was tough sometimes," she said, "but it made me realize that I wanted to work in a profession that actually helps people."

Since her grandfather passed away, Nikki has become a certified nursing assistant and plans to get all the training to become a registered nurse. In May, she passed her state certification test with flying colors.

"It was a tough test," the Parker native admitted, "but it wasn't nearly as tough as our review session. We covered all our bases." All twelve students passed their certification.

"I'm a single mother of two," Amidan explained. "I knew I wanted to take the first steps toward a career, so I contacted La Paz County One-Stop Career Center and signed up for their CNA fast-track program."

The class lasted nine weeks, which fit perfectly into her schedule. She saw her kids every night after school, and she was able to get weekends off.

"Even though it was such a short time, I didn't feel rushed," she said. "Our professor and his assistant had real-world experience, so they gave us a real perspective. They explained each concept in many different ways until every single person in the class understood."

Students didn't need any prior knowledge in order to succeed in the program. "Students were from different backgrounds and different ages," Nikki explained, "but we all banded together and depended on each other. It was a good group."

Now that her group has spread apart and started searching for jobs, Nikki has no regrets about signing up for the program. She's currently working as an accountant at Walmart to provide for her kids and fund the rest of her nursing classes. "I feel like I've really found what I want to do," she said. "I'm not there yet, but the County really helped me get started."

**"THIS PROGRAM OPENED MY EYES TO WHAT I  
COULD DO. AND I CAN DO A LOT."**

## COYOTES GET READY FOR SUMMER JOBS

In the first two weeks of June, 80 young adults throughout Mohave and La Paz counties began participating in the 2010 COYOTE Summer Program. These brand new COYOTES are gearing up for eight weeks of job training and experience. For many of them, they'll be getting their very first paycheck.

"I'm really looking forward to dealing with finances," said Kingman COYOTE Braxton Legg. "I think that's something really important for people my age to practice."

Braxton, along with the other COYOTES from Kingman, Parker, Bullhead City, and Lake Havasu City, will be paid \$7.25 an hour to work in jobs that were specifically matched to their skills and interests.

"The summer program is divided into two weeks of work readiness classes, followed by six weeks of job experience," said Mohave County Youth Program Coordinator Hannah Sagisi.

The COYOTES are currently still in the classroom, learning about resumes, interviews, and proper attitudes.

In addition to worksheets and activities, COYOTES can watch a variety of guest speakers that can "help keep the youth focused and show them the many options that they have in life," according to Mohave County Program Representative Jennifer Peterson. Speakers have included representatives from local schools, health care facilities, government offices, the military, and businesses.

"I'm excited to actually get started on the job, but these training weeks are important too," said Havasu COYOTE Jesenia Escobedo.



Many COYOTES realize that they're not just doing class work, but preparing for their futures. Kingman COYOTE Tiana Wilson sees that the importance of this program is that "you'll be able to know that you can sign up for something and follow through until the very end."

Future employers are similarly excited to see what the youth have to offer. Mohave County Office Specialist Becky Smathers will supervise her third COYOTE this year. "I'm looking forward to seeing another young person start working toward being a successful employee. I'm excited to see them grow," she said.





The Bullhead City COYOTEs take a break from mock interviews to pose with Mohave County Program Representative Liz Albin. "Every day, I'm impressed by their professionalism," she said. Albin, like the other teachers, works with the COYOTEs one-on-one and facilitates their group activities.



La Paz County Program Manager Mona Duran teaches the Parker COYOTEs how to fill out an application. "The COYOTE program is a true success story for our county," Duran said. "Even though we've received less funding, we are still able to work with over 20 COYOTEs because of our private sponsors. The area is very supportive of this program."



Mohave County Program Representative Jennifer Peterson is surrounded by a pack of Lake Havasu City COYOTEs, all ready to work. "People my age need this kind of training," said COYOTE Nathan Van Horn (back row, far left). "My generation is the foundation for our society's future."



All 34 Kingman COYOTEs finish their first day of job readiness training. "We're just getting started," COYOTE Amanda Spangler said, "so I'm more excited than nervous."



# FACES

**Wendy McGuire**

## **Bullhead City - Mohave County**

Wendy McGuire has experience helping people recover from illnesses. For several years, she worked with Acute Care, helping stroke victims regain their mobility. "It's the most rewarding thing in the world," she said. "After working with someone for weeks and weeks, I would run into them shopping at the supermarket by themselves. It doesn't sound like a big deal, but it really is. I saw how far they've come."

Wendy has come pretty far herself. Last year, she was struggling with three jobs to provide for her children. Now she's training to be a certified physical therapy assistant (PTA) with support from the One-Stop Career Center in Bullhead City.

"I feel lucky to be part of the PTA program at Mohave Community College," she said. "It's fascinating, almost like learning a new language. It takes all your focus."

Wendy's home life is just as busy. In addition to raising two young sons, she also took care of 17-year-old twin nieces. The twins have since moved out, but are still a major part of her life. "I love my family," she said, "but sometimes it's emotionally exhausting."

While a full-time class schedule might seem like too much of a time commitment for this soccer mom, Wendy knows that it's worth it. "Sure, classes are hard," she said, "but pretty soon, I can start on a career that will give me much more family time."

In recognition of her efforts as a student, worker, and mom, Wendy was awarded the "Women's Opportunity Award" from both the local and regional Soroptimist organizations. She plans to attend the award ceremony in Palm Springs this summer.

"My kids can sometimes get upset when I have to stay late or study at the dinner table," she said. "Now I can tell them that it's all paying off."

The local chapter of Soroptimists International gathers to celebrate Wendy McGuire and four other women on April 27 at Laughlin Ranch. Wendy, who was presented with a \$1000 prize and is eligible to win up to \$10,000 more, calls the award "the biggest honor I've ever received."



## OLDER WORKERS FIND A PLACE WITH TITLE V



*Lynne Steiger, Title V Program Representative (center) with Cynthia Michaels and Carol Metheny, Title V participants.*

This month, five new participants in Title V completed their orientation. They've all started new jobs.

Title V is a federally funded program that gives workers aged 55 and over a part-time, minimum wage position while they're looking for unsubsidized employment, according to Program Representative Lynne Steiger.

The program has a four-year limit for participants, she said.

"Clients are placed into jobs at non-profit and government organizations for up to four years," said Mohave County Office Clerk Cynthia Michaels. "They do a very good job matching a worker's skills with a host agency."

There are currently 20 participants in Title V. They're working everywhere from the health department to the public defender's office.

"The end goal is unsubsidized employment," Michaels said, "but it's also more than that. It's about people being able to live their lives with grace and dignity."

Michaels is a huge supporter of the program, not just because she deals with clients, but because she's also part of the program. A year ago, she was out of a job. Steiger saw her potential and accepted her into Title V right away.

"Without this," Michaels said, "I wouldn't be in Mohave County. I wouldn't be the person I am today. When I started, I didn't have transportation or a place to live. The program helped me with those necessities, and it helped me with self-confidence too. This is a great opportunity to transform your life, so don't be afraid to reach out for it. It'll make you feel like a brand new person."

*Title V alumnae Becki Wetzel (left) and Mary Jennings pose with new Title V participant Barbara Fordyce in the Public Health Department. Wetzel and Jennings have already found unsubsidized employment.*



# FACES

**Jennifer Gibson**

**Kingman - Mohave County**

In May, Jennifer Gibson graduated with certificates in both Medical Billing/Coding and Medical Assisting. "My life is changing so fast," she said. "A few months ago, I didn't even have a GED."

Jennifer, a Colorado native, was enrolled into Mohave County's fast-track medical billing and coding program only a month after moving to Kingman. Classes started right away and "I was thrown into this program," she said. "It's a lot to take in, so I'm grateful to have the right instructors."

Mohave County One-Stop helped her with travel and education expenses, including her Certified Professional Coder test in Phoenix. She passed her certification and has since moved on to Medical Assisting, which she calls "my future career, a field that I am so happy to join."

Mohave County also helped her take and pass the GED test. "I dropped out of high school. I'm a single mom. Getting my GED was a big step for me," she said.

Jennifer lives with her father, stepmother, and two young children. They offer her support after a long day of taking notes and dissecting sheep organs. "My kids are really excited about what I'm learning. After studying the heart, I came home and my three-year-old got really excited because he just learned where his heart was."

Jennifer's heart is firmly in her career, which is just getting started. Jennifer is finishing her externship at the Physical Clinic at Kingman Regional Medical Center.

When she's not working, Jennifer spends as much time with her family as possible. "My kids don't like me being away all the time," she said, "but they're excited for when I can finally bring home a stethoscope."



*Jennifer Gibson celebrates her graduation from MCC with her stepfather and her son.*



# MOHAVE COUNTY PREPARES FOR A GREEN FUTURE

Last month, Mohave County took part in a series of round-table discussions about the future of Arizona's green economy. The results of the discussion will be released later this year.

Mohave County was one of five Arizona locations chosen for the discussions, which were conducted in conjunction with Battelle and the Council for Community and Economic Research (C2ER).

"This project is part of an overall effort to survey green firms throughout the state of Arizona," said Ron Kelly of C2ER. "This will give us a sense of current green employment and any future green employment projected for the next year."

The sessions were facilitated by Steve Andrade of Battelle, who had two clear goals in mind: "On an economic development side, we want a better picture of what this green economy looks like and what kinds of firms and technologies are coming forward to hopefully grow the economy. On the workforce side, we want to determine what skills are needed for green jobs."

To accomplish those goals, Mohave County invited a variety of business, education, and government representatives to participate.

"We definitely have a better sense of what job opportunities are out there right now and hopefully we're paving the way for better jobs in the future," said Shawn Williams of the International Union of Operating Engineers.

Sunny Wilcox, training coordinator at Kingman's Walmart location, agrees. "This meeting was eye-opening. It's important to be part of the community and show our support for the community, especially in relation to green efforts," she said.

While each participant took away something different from the event, they were all appreciative of the opportunity to express themselves and listen to others.

"I think, to a person, the participants appreciated the opportunity to just voice their thoughts, concerns, and ideas," said Workforce Development Manager Jen Miles. "One of the most important aspects of the focus groups is that they created a dialogue among stakeholders."



*Mohave County Workforce Development Manager Jen Miles introduces the first of four group discussions on Thursday, April 29 at the Mohave County building in Kingman*



## FACES

**Wendy Holsopple**

**Lake Havasu City - Mohave County**

Wendy Holsopple knows that if you want to be employed, you have to get off the couch and do something. "You can't sit at home and get a job," she said. "You have to use all the resources available."

She found those resources at the One-Stop Career Center in Lake Havasu City, where the Career Coaches helped her excel in the fast-track Certified Nursing Assistant program at MCC.

Even though the fast-track program was "pretty intense," Wendy and her classmates decided to condense the program by an extra week and a half. "It was non-stop," she said, "but as long as people apply themselves, they can complete it with or without prior knowledge."

Wendy does have prior medical knowledge. Before relocating to Arizona, she worked at a California hospital for 15 years.

"Since moving to Havasu in 2005," she said, "I've had odd jobs here and there. Now that I have my certification, I've been working as a pharmacy technician and a ward clerk secretary at La Paz Regional Medical Center in Parker."

She enjoys working with patients, many of whom are nervous about their upcoming procedures. "A big part of my job is to keep patients happy while they're waiting," she said.

Her new job is great experience for Wendy, who hopes to one day become a licensed practical nurse. She works with a staff that she calls "very receptive and willing to guide me through everything."

Holsopple believes that it's never too late to learn a new field. Not only does this open pathways, but it increases a person's self-esteem. "Having the One-Stop really raised my spirits in this economy," she said.

Wendy's advice to Mohave County residents is to use the resources that are available. "A lot of people are not seeking them out," she said. "You don't need to be needy to use County resources, and you definitely don't want to wait until the last minute to use them."

**"I'M CONSTANTLY RECOMMENDING THE ONE-STOP TO MY FRIENDS, EVEN IF THEY JUST DROP IN AND TALK ABOUT POSSIBLE JOB LISTINGS. I HOPE PEOPLE SEE ME AS A GOOD EXAMPLE OF WHAT THE ONE-STOP CAN DO."**

# MOHAVE COUNTY OFFERS NEW HIRING TOOL

When a local company asked Mohave County Business Services Representative Mary Mendola if she could recommend any job applicants with forklift experience, she knew exactly where to look.

"I opened up our database and did a query on forklift experience," she said. She instantly found several worthy candidates. "Our database is a really good place to start when a construction or production business wants to hire someone with a specific skill set."

The Renewable Energy Careers Database was created by Mohave County Administrative Supervisor Lynne Stiegler and Office Clerk Alex Ball.

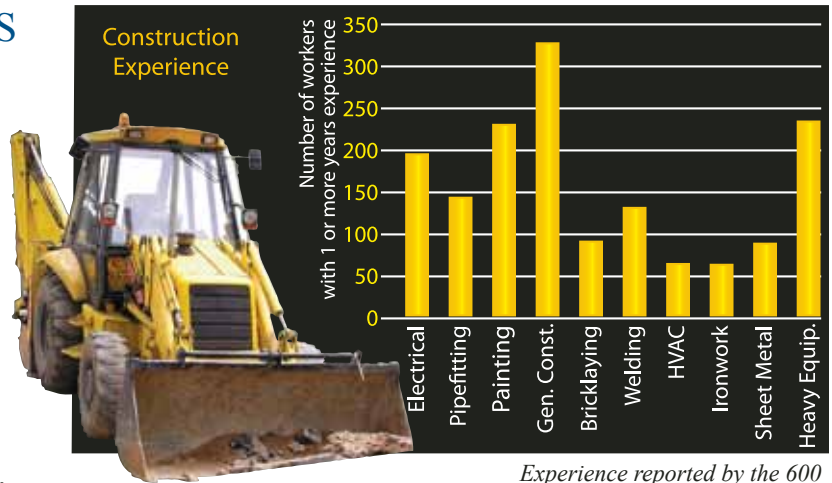
This database "allows you to pull information virtually any way you can think, by zeroing in on the minutest detail or by pulling back to the big picture," said Stiegler.

"We've entered data for close to 600 people," said Ball, "but that number keeps growing. About fifteen new applications come in each week."

The database uses information from the Mohave County Energy Careers Alliance's Career Placement Inventory, which was distributed in March. Mendola created the survey with input from the alliance and a representative from the Arizona State Building and Construction Trades Council.

"The goal of this project is to have a list of unemployed and under-employed individuals and an idea of their skill sets," Mendola said. "This will give us a better idea of the skill level for the whole community, and will help us accommodate jobseekers, particularly those interested in green jobs."

For those who want to be included in the database, surveys can be found at [www.co.mohave.az.us/energycareers](http://www.co.mohave.az.us/energycareers) or at any One-Stop Career Center location. "We still encourage people to fill them out," Mendola said. "That way, when we get any interest from upcoming projects, we already have your information."



*Experience reported by the 600 participants in the Renewable Energy Careers Database*

## MOHAVE - LA PAZ ONE-STOP CAREER CENTERS

### KINGMAN

#### MOHAVE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE SITE

Mohave County Community Services Department

700 W. Beale Street, Kingman

PHONE: 928-753-0723 FAX: 928-753-0776 TDD: 928-753-0726

[www.co.mohave.az.us/workforce](http://www.co.mohave.az.us/workforce)

Department of Economic Security 301 Pine Street, Kingman PHONE: 928-753-4333

#### SATELLITE OFFICES

Mohave County Community Services Department

1355 Ramar Rd. Ste.3, Bullhead City PHONE: 928-758-0702 FAX: 928-758-0737

Department of Economic Security

2601 S. Hwy. 95, Bullhead City PHONE: 928-763-4154

Mohave County Community Services Department

2001 College Dr. Ste. 122, Lake Havasu City PHONE: 928-453-0710 FAX: 928-453-0728

Department of Economic Security

228 London Bridge Rd., Lake Havasu City PHONE: 928-854-0350

REPAC OFFICE—Dislocated Workers PHONE: 928-854-0376

#### LA PAZ COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE SITE

La Paz Career Center

1113 Kofa Ave., Parker PHONE: (928)669-9812 FAX: 928-669-6326

Department of Economic Security

1032 Hope Ave., Parker PHONE: 928-669-6755

### LAKE HAVASU CITY

### BULLHEAD CITY

### PARKER



Mohave County One-Stop Career Center is an equal opportunity employer and provider of employment and training services. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to persons with disabilities.