

New ARRA grant to help workforce

KINGMAN – Federal dollars are coming to Mohave County to help train prospective employees for “green” energy industrial jobs.

On Friday, Jan 22, a news release from Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer announced the state was awarded \$5 million of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds by the U.S. Department of Labor for training workers for “the skills required in emerging industries, including energy efficiency and renewable energy.”

Mohave and La Paz counties have applied to receive \$171,844 of that State Energy Sector Partnership and Training grant, Mohave County Workforce Development Manager Jen Miles said. “The state sought \$6 million and was awarded five. We applied for \$171,844 and hope to get that amount or close to it. Once received, the grant funds will be used to train individuals for jobs in the renewable energy industry.”

The training will focus on a variety of jobs that will be needed for the renewable energy facilities that are working to locate in the region, she said. “Clearly, many of the jobs involving site preparation and facility installation will require people skilled in the construction trades. Later, technician-level jobs will be associated with solar and wind turbine facility operations and grounds maintenance. We hope to address short- and longer-term training needs. For the existing skilled workforce, we may be able to package short-term customized training to upgrade skills on specific industry requirements. Longer term, we are working with education and training partners to ensure pathways exist to



Jen Miles

obtain certifications that are specific to the renewable energy industry.”

There will be quite a variety of skills needed, “all good jobs,” Miles said. “In addition to training for industrial jobs, we are also looking at certification training for jobs related to energy efficient buildings in the residential and commercial environment.”

The money hasn’t arrived at Mohave County yet, but, according to Miles, “Once they announce a grant, it is usually received within a couple of months. We recently received \$315,000 of ARRA funds for the Energy Careers Project. The new grant will be added to that amount. When those dollars come in, they will augment our Workforce Development efforts and make them stronger.

“It is really important that this new grant dovetails really nicely with our current Energy Careers Project grant,” she said. “We are already working with the stakeholders and partners to define the types of jobs, training needs and the timeline for energy jobs in Mohave and La Paz

counties. The new three-year Energy Sector grant expands our capacity to customize the training to our region and work with a statewide partnership to further refine the curriculum and understanding of the industry.”

Training funded by the new grant will not begin right away, Miles said. “Initially, we will work with local and state partners to develop job projections, training curriculum and options.”

When the county begins to recruit participants for the training program, individual skill levels required for each job will vary.

“It will be important to know industry certifications required and the levels of skills necessary for each job,” she said. “Some individuals will come in already highly skilled, especially those who have worked in construction, such as welders and electricians. There will be others who don’t have the skills. We recognize our recruits will have a variety of skill levels. We need to create a pipeline type of strategy so people who want to get into the industry have the opportunity to get the academic and occupational skills necessary for employment.”

Miles said the first training will probably target those who are already skilled in the construction trades.

“We will be able to get them up to speed quickly and get them back into employment in the new jobs,” she said. Once a construction phase is completed, “some of those workers who are good performers could land full-time operation jobs that come available at the facilities.”

Grant requirements are that the funded participants must be “income eligible,” she said. “We will have an application and eligibility process similar to the Fast Track project that we are still completing. With that program, we brought in over 100 people for training in partnership with Mohave Community College.”

Miles said an orientation and application fair will be held in the spring to “engage potential participants. An announcement of the time, date and place will be made prior to that event. The fair will offer public information, an orientation and complete application process to anyone who is interested. The process will afford a potential opportunity for people who are really motivated to get into this new industry and develop a future.

“We are working with representatives from all of the major employers who are planning on moving into our region to understand and address their workforce needs,” she said. “The permitting and political processes will continue; however, that is not what we do. Our grant requirement is to move forward in a good-faith effort to work with the potential employers and stakeholders to create the opportunity to develop our workforce. We are dedicated to make that happen.”

Miles said she is excited about the opportunities the ARRA grants are offering Mohave County residents.

“These are the jobs of the future,” she said. “Our One-Stop Career Center team is pleased to be able to help cultivate and nurture this region’s workforce to meet new challenges. Right now, our county is still suffering from the recession and the unemployment rate is high. We need the jobs that this new technology’s investment will bring to Mohave County.”