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BCCC partnership anticipates growth of wind energy

By: **JOHN ANASTASI**
Bucks County Courier Times

TEXT SIZE

Bucks County Community College and Gamesa have joined forces to train workers for job opportunities in the wind-energy industry.

Bucks County Community College Monday welcomed Gamesa into the Green Jobs Academy, where it will help train workers to seize employment opportunities in the wind-energy industry.

The Green Jobs Academy opened in April in Bristol Township's Bridge Business Center. There, the college is teaming up with area alternative energy companies to develop and teach courses that prepare students of all ages for careers in various "green" fields.

"Gamesa is again hiring," said Kurt Geiger, Gamesa's North American vice president for human capital management. "We're happy to partner with the Green Jobs Academy, where we can train people from this region and from others for those jobs."

The Spanish wind turbine company manufactures turbine engine housings at Falls' Keystone Industrial Port Complex. It joins companies like Bristol Township nanotechnology startup Y-Carbon and Falls' AE Polysilicon, which produces a key solar cell component, in lending support to the academy.

For the wind-energy industry to grow and thrive in the United States, it needs a ready-made work force, Geiger said.

"Training at the Green Jobs Academy is part of the fuel that grows our industry for the future," he added.

Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection Secretary John Hanger said Pennsylvania is now home to 16 wind farms that can produce enough energy to power 240,000 homes - and "we're just getting started."

"This is about preparing for the future and making sure our people, when in the work force, can keep the jobs and when they're looking for a job, they're well-positioned to get it," Hanger said.

A 240-hour, online Wind Energy Apprentice program is listed among the current Green Jobs Academy offerings at www.bucks.edu/coned/green. Tuition is \$2,195. The academy is already running a 12-week course offering pre-apprenticeship training in the electrical and solar photovoltaic fields and sustainability procedures.

The academy and its programs have received more than \$1 million in government funding, including a \$631,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Energy for weatherization training and a \$315,000 grant from the state Department of Labor and Industry for training veterans to work in alternative energy fields. Congressman Patrick Murphy, D-8, also secured \$600,000 for the academy in the 2010 fiscal year.

Bucks County has lost 15,000 jobs due to the gradual erosion of its manufacturing base, Murphy said.

"We're fighting back with the Green Jobs Academy to regain what we've lost over 30 years," he added.

Robert Garraty stressed that the training that will take place at the Green Jobs Academy is driven by a growing industry and that the government is not "putting money into training programs for jobs that don't exist."

"We feel we're investing wisely," said Garraty. He's the deputy secretary for workforce development with the state Department of Labor and Industry.

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One resident who's grateful for the investment is Clark Fuss.

The Warminster man, a project manager by trade, has been unemployed for two years. He's starting his third week in the solar program, which he hopes will prepare him to oversee solar installations.

"I've been aggressive with the job search, but I've never been out of work this long," Fuss said. "This is an emerging industry and at my age (51) I could use some help (getting into it)."

For more information about the courses available through the Green Jobs Academy, call 215-788-3594.

June 29, 2010 02:11 AM

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