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[Home](#) / [College News](#) / BNSF Railway And Barstow Community College Collaborate To Provide Welding Certification For Railroad Employees

BNSF Railway and Barstow Community College collaborate to provide welding certification for railroad employees



Barstow, CA – As part of its continuing commitment to creating innovative programs that meet the needs of local employers and employees for workforce development, Barstow Community College (BCC) has established a contract education program with BNSF Railway to provide welding instruction for BNSF employees. The first course is a two-week intensive program that leads to certification. This training program is conducted by BCC welding instructors who are AWS Certified Welding Inspectors. Two more advanced welding courses will be offered in the future.

The first group of seven local BNSF employees began their training on August 6, 2018 in the new welding lab at BCC. The second cohort of ten students has now begun training. These are the first of a large group of BNSF employees who will be training at BCC in the coming years. Welding Instructor Rick Bremen observed, “This is such a win/win opportunity for both BCC and BNSF.” He continued, “Before this, BNSF employees traveled to Denver or Kansas for this training. Now Barstow will be the location for West Coast training.” BCC’s Program Director Todd Bartholow added, “This new lab will also be available for other BCC welding classes that provide our students with training and skills development that will lead to future employment opportunities.”

Lawrence Dale, former Mayor of Barstow and retired BNSF Locomotive Shop Superintendent, and Barstow businessman Michael Lewis were key advocates for bringing this training program to Barstow. They met with representatives of the college and BNSF which resulted in the creation of a five-year contract. The college agreed to

remodel the former fitness center into a state-of-the-art welding lab. The new lab has been specifically designed for this program and is equipped with Oxy/Propane, Shielded Metal and Flux Core Arc welding equipment that matches the needs of local and regional industries and employers.

Dr. Eva Bagg, Superintendent-President of BCC, affirmed the college’s position regarding this program with BNSF and additional local economic development projects, “BCC is deeply committed to expanding the Career and Technical Education (CTE) opportunities in Barstow.” Dr. Bagg also recognized the important leadership role of Sandi Thomas, BCC’s Dean of Instruction for CTE and Workforce & Economic Development, “She was truly the driving force behind the college responding to the need that BNSF presented to us.”

Dean Thomas worked directly with Ricky Bell, Manager of Railroad Training at BNSF to make sure that the facilities and training courses were designed and implemented according to BNSF specifications. She noted, “It is important that we work closely with our industry partners to create programs, degrees and certificates that provide the training and skills our students require to meet the needs of their employers.” She continued, “These contract education programs will lead to higher paying jobs that will greatly improve the economy and standard of living in the communities of the high desert.”

Lena Kent, Director of Public Affairs at BNSF Railway added, “We appreciate BCC’s willingness to collaborate with local employers and we’re proud to partner with them to develop this state-of-the-art program that allows our employees to receive valuable training right here in Barstow. This program is a great example of how industry and educators can work together to ensure that employees continue to build their skills.”

Contract education programs at Barstow Community College are contributing to workforce and economic development efforts throughout the state of California. Specialized training courses and educational opportunities are being created to address the needs of growing businesses and industries in the BCC District. Business leaders and area residents are encouraged to visit www.Barstow.edu to learn more about these courses, programs and opportunities!



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