

## Skills to Rebuild program reactivated to help Cordell reconstruction efforts

Oklahoma's CareerTech system, which launched a massive construction skills training program after devastating tornadoes hit Oklahoma City and central Oklahoma in May 1999, is gearing up to repeat the process. This time the program is being implemented in Cordell.

A tornado smashed into the small western Oklahoma town last October, leaving about 100 homes destroyed and 350 more damaged. Reconstruction work is just getting started.

The project, called *Skills to Rebuild*, offers free construction skills training classes and other services. It is being coordinated by Western Technology Center, located in nearby Burns Flat. Cliff Corbin, Western's assistant superintendent, said the Cordell project is modeled after the original *Skills to Rebuild* program launched in May 1999.

Overseeing the Cordell Skills to Rebuild program is Jerry Koehn, a retired construction technology instructor at Canadian Valley Technology Center and private contractor. Koehn is assisting Cordell residents and contractors



From left are Western Technology Center Assistant Superintendent Cliff Corbin, Cordell resident Roy Dewees, and Jerry Koehn, coordinator of the Cordell Skills to Rebuild program. Koehn is offering free construction training to Dewees and other Cordell residents who are rebuilding their homes after the October 2001 tornadoes.

who are working on reconstruction of houses damaged by the tornado.

"I advise out-of-town contractors where to get local building materials, and I help them get homes ready for the building inspector," Koehn said. He is also working with town officials to update Cordell's building code.

Koehn has met with several Cordell residents to offer assistance on their

reconstruction projects and will offer free classes (based on the needs of the community) in the near future.

"Right now I am making plans to have a public town hall meeting to get better acquainted with local residents," he said.

He also envisions teaching classes at the homes of residents working on reconstruction projects.

For more information about the Cordell *Skills to Rebuild* program, contact Jerry Koehn at 580-832-3825.



Oklahoma CareerTech's  
**Skills to Rebuild**

# WTC meat processing program attracts students from different states, countries

Western Technology Center's meat processing and marketing program is known far and wide. It has attracted students from Texas, Alabama, and as far away as Mexico. According to Instructor Dennis McRee, the program is "the only one of its kind west of the Mississippi."

Started in 1973, the meat processing and marketing program prepares students for a variety of careers in the industry such as retail meat cutters, meat wrappers, processing personnel, sausage makers and meat inspectors.

"Students are taught how to operate equipment such as saws, grinders, mixers and smokers," McRee said. "In addition to the red meat items, we also smoke turkey, ham and sausage."

There are currently 23 students in the meat processing and marketing program. The classes are a mix of adult and high school students. According to McRee, adult students can complete the program in a year while high school students, who attend classes part-time, take two years to finish the program.



*From left are: Jose Mora, a native of Mexico, and Western Technology Center Instructor Dennis McRee. Mora is one of several students who have come from other states and countries to attend Western's meat processing and marketing program.*

"That means a high school student can graduate from the program and make about \$10 an hour," McRee said. "That is not bad money for an 18-year-old."

Western Technology Center (WTC) works closely with the meat industry to keep up to date with industry trends through its annual Meat Academy. The 14<sup>th</sup> Meat Academy was hosted last October at the Burns Flat campus.

McRee said about 40 meat processing professionals from six states and more than a dozen Oklahoma communities attended the three-day academy.

"WTC meat processing students also participated in the academy as part of their curriculum," he said. "Besides sharing ideas and industry updates, the academy also informs attendees about the latest Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP)

regulations for small meat processing plants to large-scale meat processing operations."

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Dr. Joe Cordray, extension meat specialist at Iowa State University's Department of Animal Science, led the academy, along with several other industry experts, and shared new and innovative processing techniques.

McRee said Cordray has been instrumental in the continuing success of the Meat Academy because of his emphasis on participants learning skills and knowledge useful in the meat industry.

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# FFA, agricultural education helped transform Watkins from shy youth to state leader

U.S. Rep. Wes Watkins started life with the odds stacked against him. Watkins, who came from a poor family and had a speech impediment, never imagined he would go on to head one of Oklahoma's largest student organizations and have a successful career in politics.

He said FFA played a large role in transforming him from a shy youth to a community and state leader.

That is why he is being recognized as a *CareerTech* champion. Champions are alumni of the system's programs or student organizations who attribute much of their success to their *CareerTech* experience.

As a child, Watkins' family was so poor that they could not afford to buy and feed the animals required for many FFA projects and competitions. But his agricultural education instructor, Harold

Chitwood at Bennington High School in Bryan County, encouraged him to compete in areas that did not require much cost such as parliamentary procedure, animal judging and public speaking.

The FFA public speaking contests helped Watkins overcome his shyness. That is why he holds the student organization in such great esteem.

"There are two things that make goose bumps go up and down my back; one is the flag, Old Glory, flying over this nation's capitol when I walk by it at night, and the other is when I see FFA members in their blue jackets," he said. "I get an emotional feeling because FFA lifted me out of the depths of poverty and personal problems to the halls of Congress."

After high school, Watkins received bachelor's and master's degrees in agricultural education from Oklahoma State University and was also named state president of the Oklahoma FFA while in college. He has a great appreciation for career and technology education and, as a policy maker, he is one of the Oklahoma *CareerTech* system's biggest advocates.

"*CareerTech* helps young people develop a skill or trade, self-esteem and leadership abilities," said Watkins, who also has a technology center in Wetumka named after him. "For adults, *CareerTech* can offer a wide array of educational options, including customized training for specific jobs or industries."

"It is important for young people to utilize Oklahoma's *CareerTech* system to obtain the skills they need for gainful



employment and to be productive members of their community," he said.

During his term in government, Watkins has spent an enormous amount of time and political capital in support of career and technology education. One of his most recent achievements was securing close to \$1 million in federal funds for the *CareerTech* Learning Network, which provides online training and education resources. He was also instrumental in raising funds for the Francis Tuttle Endowed Chair at Oklahoma State University.

Watkins, who has served in the Oklahoma Senate and is currently in his 10th term in the U.S. House of Representatives, has received many awards and accolades for his dedication to *CareerTech* education.

He has received the distinguished service award from the National Association of State Directors for Vocational-Technical Education Consortium, the National Policy Maker of the Year Award from the Association for Career and Technical Education and was recently inducted into the Oklahoma Vo-Tech Hall of Fame.



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## *Francis Tuttle, Metro Tech IT programs receive national honors*

Information Technology programs at two Oklahoma City area technology centers have received national recognition from the National Dissemination Center for Career and Technical Education (CTE).

The CTE named Metro Technology Centers' South Bryant Campus Computer Graphic Design program as an exemplary program and Francis Tuttle Technology Center's Database Administrator program as a promising program.

A panel of university-level researchers and state-level administrators within CTE worked with the staff of the Sharing and Celebrating Exemplary and Promising Career and Technical Education Programs project to review applications and

*"Graduates from the program have 90 percent job-related placement. The average salary for a database administrator job is \$43,000."*

conduct extensive on-site program reviews.

Metro Tech's Computer Graphic Design program prepares secondary and postsecondary students for careers in print, Web and multimedia design.

"The program places heavy emphasis on teamwork, dependability, time management, and attention to detail," said Dr. Ann Benson, state *CareerTech* director. "Industry partnerships provide students with real-life experiences.

**Metro Tech**

Students have partnered with Lt. Gov. Mary Fallin's office, the Oklahoma Film Commission and the Jim Thorpe Association to develop interactive Web sites."

Francis Tuttle's Database Administrator program was established in 1998. Marla Lobo, the lead instructor, is an 18-year veteran of the Information Technology field.

"From its inception, the program has obtained strong support from internal and external organizations. For example, the state *CareerTech* agency helped the program build its partnership with Oracle Corporation," Benson said.

"Graduates from the program have 90 percent job-related placement. The average salary for a database administrator job is \$43,000."

  
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