

ACE MENTORS OPEN THE DOOR To Construction Careers

BY ERIN VONDERSCHER

Synergy Group

Construction is a hands-on career and, through the ACE Mentoring Program, local high school students now have a hands-on opportunity to learn about careers in the construction industry.

The nationwide not-for-profit ACE Mentoring Program, named for the architecture, construction and engineering industries it serves, is offered to high school students free of charge by the Associated General Contractors of St. Louis. Each semester, twice a month, 15 students from the Construction Careers Center Charter High School meet with industry volunteers who introduce them to people, projects and opportunities within the construction industry.

"The Construction Careers Center opens doors to talented young adults who have the potential to truly succeed in this industry," said Sally Bartnett, business development manager for Walton Construction Co. and a volunteer with the ACE Mentoring Program.

The program covers several disciplines, including architecture, planning, interior design and multiple areas of engineering. In addition to providing technical advice, the ACE Mentoring Program is a source for career guidance, helping students realize what they want to do and how they can do it. By exploring challenges and improving skills, mentors prepare students for their future careers.

"Each mentor offers a different area of expertise," said Terry Eivins, AGC director of apprenticeship and training. "They all come together to help these students."

Bartnett, for example, stresses the importance of professional speaking and presentation skills, which she says most people take for granted. Her exercises include mock bid days, follow-up phone messages and other scenarios that occur during a typical business day in the construction industry.

"To be successful, the students need to feel confident in their interactions with construction industry executives and clients," said Bartnett, "I encourage them to ask questions and think about the little details that can make or break a project."

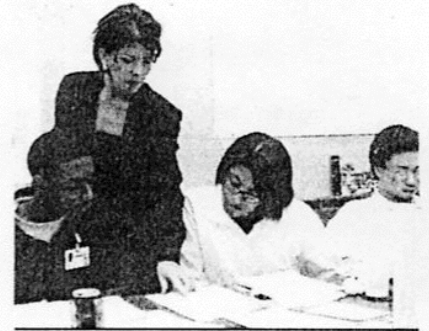
According to Eivins, the ACE Mentoring Program thrives through the help of volunteers like Bartnett, who provide students with numerous opportunities to gain real-world construction experience and think seriously about their long-term careers. Students in the program recently visited the University of Missouri at Rolla and Southern Illinois University campuses to learn about the schools' higher education programs. ACE also offers scholarships to help exceptional students further their education.

A number of companies provide internship opportunities through the ACE program. For example, Kwame Building Group, one of the largest pure construction management firms in the country, provided two paid internships last summer at the Lambert International Airport expansion project.

"Nobody rises to low expectations," said Tony Thompson, president of KWAME, which is also involved in the construction of the Cardinals' new Busch Stadium. "If we don't create quality learning opportunities for these students, who else is going to do it?" Ultimately, the ACE Mentoring Program benefits both students and mentors.

"I want my students to envision themselves as project engineers, project managers or even owners of their own construction companies," said Bartnett. "Personally, I'm motivated when I see these teens realize their dreams as reality."

The mission of the Construction Careers Center is to prepare students in grades nine through twelve for the future by providing an excellent foundation in academics, broad exposure to the construction industry, and relevant vocational education preparation. For more information on the ACE Mentoring Program, contact Terry Eivins at 314-644-1525.



Sally Bartnett, of Walton Construction mentors ACE students, from left to right, Kendrec England, Ashley Wells and Glenn Howson.