

## Construction Curriculum Captivates St. Louis Students



The next generation of construction craftworkers is getting an early start on its training. About 280 high school students are studying history, math, computer science, bricklaying and blueprint reading at the first charter school in the country devoted to construction education—The Construction Careers Center in St. Louis, Mo.

The school, located in the city's downtown with the Gateway Arch visible in the background, opened its doors in 2001 to a freshman class of about 50 boys and girls. Next year those students, now juniors, will be the first graduating class of the program chartered by the St. Louis Public Schools and the brainchild of the Associated General Contractors of St. Louis (ENR 1/22/2001 p.11).

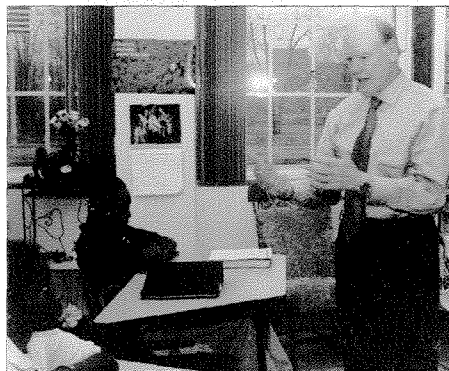
The school works closely with the local construction community. Private companies, unions and industry trade groups are the guardian angels who collectively renovated the school building and serve as mentors and advisors.

In three years the student body has grown to include a sophomore class of about 100 students and a freshman class of 130. About 87% of the students are boys and 13% are girls, says Lanette M. McVey, the school administrator. The

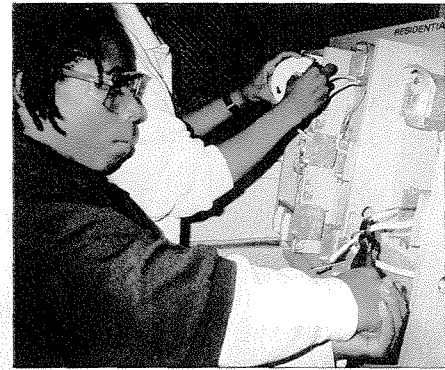
school aims to prepare students for entry into a construction apprenticeship training program or for higher education.

Renovation of the three-story school was completed this year. In January, the school formally opened the doors of a new shop facility. It includes work stations where first-year students perfect basic skills in numerous construction crafts such as bricklaying, welding, electrical wiring, carpentry and drywall installation. Sophomores learn blueprint reading and estimating and juniors explore more advanced construction techniques and technology.

Construction themes are woven into math, science and history lessons. The curriculum also includes field trips to



**Pay Day.** Snow gives lecture on government.



**Hands on.** In new shop facility, students learn basic construction skills, including wiring.

local construction sites for older students.

In a recent American history class, students had an impromptu lesson in government from a guest instructor, John W. Snow, U.S. Treasury Secretary. Snow added his autograph to dollar bills for each student, allowing comparisons with his imprinted signature that indicates the currency is legal tender.

The Plumbing Industry Council and plumbers and pipefitters' union Local 562 recently sponsored a three-week program that included classroom and hands-on lessons in commercial and residential plumbing and pipefitting. Meyer hopes other crafts will offer similar programs. "You see the light turn on when they get the tools in their hands," she says.

Despite the school's industry ties, graduates are not guaranteed admission to an apprenticeship program. Many trades have more applicants than available spaces and admission standards are high. Students below a certain skill level in reading and math are not accepted, says Tom Ostermeyer, coordinator of the St. Louis Cement Masons Joint Apprenticeship Committee. Teachers focus on those skill levels and other life lessons.

Kenneth Gibbs, 14, says he became interested in a construction career because his grandfather was an ironworker on the Arch. However, Gibbs plans to be a bricklayer. Although 16-year-old Le'Ashley Bledsoe likes roofing, she plans to attend college and study estimating. ■

By Sherie Winston in St. Louis