

# THE CONSTRUCTION COLLEGE ADVANTAGE



**WESTERN STATES**

College of Construction

FALL | 2023

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## WSCC Receives Approval for a Construction Degree Program From The State of Colorado

After a rigorous application process, the **Western States College of Construction** (WSCC) received approval in August to be an independent degree granting institution under the Colorado Department of Private Occupational Schools – the first of its kind in the country.

WSCC was officially launched in 2020 and accredited as the first professional institution of its kind in the nation by the American Council for Construction Education (ACCE) in late 2021. With eight campuses across Colorado and Wyoming, WSCC currently provides students with an opportunity to find a life-long career in the skilled trades. WSCC offers training programs in HVAC-R, pipefitting, plumbing and sheet metal, providing students with the skills and certification to work in the skilled trades. They graduate debt free while learning on the job and earning a salary.

Upon hearing the decision, WSCC President Dr. Mostafa Khattab said, “As a first of its kind institution, we are thrilled to be one step closer to our goal of providing degrees in occupational studies and construction education. WSCC looks forward to the ways this will impact the future of Colorado’s skilled trades workforce.

WSCC was formed through the collaboration between labor and management partners, including: the Rocky Mountain Mechanical Contractors Association, the United Association of Plumbers, Pipefitters, Welders, and Service Technicians, the Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors National Association – Colorado Chapter, and the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail & Transportation Workers and their construction and service contracting companies.

“This approval couldn’t have come at a better time. Workforce challenges are at an all-time high, but because of the tenacity of members in our industry, labor partners, and partnerships across the state at every level, WSCC has come to fruition. We look forward to seeing the impact this institution will have on our current and future generations of workforce,” Todd Von Lintel, WSCC Board Member and Vice President of Operations for U.S. Engineering Rocky Mountain Region weighed in.

A significant milestone for the future of construction education, it gives WSCC the authorization to confirm associate degrees in occupational studies. “The impact this decision will make on the next generation of our labor force will be huge. We’re thrilled to see another investment in skilled trades education, and we’re excited to promote the incredible industry that will help build Colorado’s future,” said Gary Arnold WSCC Board Chair and Business Manager of Pipefitters Local 208.

Western States College of Construction’s mission is to become the symbol of educational excellence that fuels the success of our graduates, industry, and society.

## COLTON FURA

### *Outstanding Apprentice*

My name is Colton Fura, and I am a pipefitter apprentice with local 192.

I fell in love with welding, tried different companies and finally landed on local 192, falling more in love with welding and pipefitting.

My favorite part of this program is having access to anything I want to learn. Everyday seems to bring something new I haven't seen.

Everyone I've worked with and gone to school with has made a positive impact on my experience here. But Robert Burns has been a great teacher and pushes me to be better every day.

My goal with this apprenticeship is to gain as much knowledge and as many certifications as possible. I really would like to be a welder pipefitter but I still would like to learn plumbing and HVAC so I can go wherever I please.

I look up to a lot of members in the hall. But, again, Robert Burns, inspires me every day to be a great welder pipefitter.

I have a lot of hobbies, but my favorites are working on my Jeep, or building computers and gaming.



## SARAH HARKSSEN

### *Outstanding Instructor*

My name is Sarah Harkssen, and I am a Plumber with UA Local 003, with seven years in the trade.

While I was a first-year apprentice in class, I remember wanting the opportunity to teach math in different ways. As I progressed through the program, and learned about what exciting changes were happening within it, I found myself wanting to help with those improvements.

I have taught math to 1st year apprentices for the past two years. This year I will also be teaching backflow prevention, as well as math for a third time. I love teaching math! Knowing how to properly apply math to plumbing often means the difference between a clean or ugly installation. Union plumbers take pride in their work, and I like helping provide



apprentices with the knowledge necessary for high quality installation.

I teach adult students, so I recognize that they have adult lives and responsibilities. I try to structure deadlines and teaching styles in ways that accommodate that, while still ensuring that they receive a quality education. Every year I tweak my lesson plans a little more, to make the class itself more engaging and collaborative.

I strive to make sure that my students can "get out what they put in" to the class.

I like to believe my students know that I care about them and their futures. I try my best to be available for questions even outside of class.

In my free time, you will likely find me hanging out with my cat, painting, fencing, or playing video games.

## CHRISTIAN RAMIREZ

### *Outstanding Apprentice*

My name is Christian, and I am an apprentice with Pipefitters Local 208.

I was originally going to college and realized that it was expensive. Not only was it expensive, but I was unsure about a major. One of my neighbors introduced me to trade school and I applied.

My favorite part of the program is the hands-on activities. My foreman, Kyle Taylor, has had a positive impact on my learning experience. He has answered many of my questions whether it be at work or even life advice.

In 5 to 10 years I see myself having a steady income and living a healthy life.

The person I look up to is my dad. Watching him wake up every morning to provide for my family, never complaining, but being grateful that he gets to go to work every day, is an inspiration.

In my free time I like to watch sports, spend time with my family and participate in outdoor activities.



## BRIAN SUMMERS

### *Outstanding Instructor*



I am Brian Summers, a Sheet Metal Worker for Local 9, with 41 years in the trade.

As a Journeyman/Foreman, I have always enjoyed teaching other members what we do. The Colorado Springs school had an opening for a night instructor in 1998. I started teaching night classes and then transitioned to teaching day

classes in 2011 in Denver. In 2014, my wife and I moved to Grand Junction where I am the coordinator for the school and also teach classes.

I teach the full Sheet Metal curriculum for all 4 years of the program. I teach math, drafting, fitting pattern development and shop fabrication, blueprint reading, installation, duct and system design, SMACNA Duct Construction Standards and fire dampers, SMACNA duct leak testing standards, material take off, sheet metal soldering, heating and refrigeration system basics, OSHA, crane signaling, fan laws and fan speeds, field measuring, calculator usage in the shop and field, venting of appliances, code classes on combustion air and dryer venting. My favorite subjects to teach are shop fabrication and math.

My philosophy is to teach to the middle of the class and

help the over achievers stay interested, challenged, and engaged. I emphasize that the apprentice will get out of the class what they put into it. I love to see the moment the "lights come on" in the apprentices mind.

I try to leave a positive impact of students by showing them I care about their future in the industry. I help the apprentices pursue areas in the trade that are their strengths. I also seek out the leaders in the class and help them advance their leadership skills.

As an apprentice, I worked in a smaller shop and had the luxury of working with all the Journeymen and Foremen in the company. They passed down to me their knowledge and showed me a strong work ethic. I spent most of my time with Hugh Palmer. Hugh showed me how to think like a foreman and look ahead on the project. He gave me responsibilities as I could handle them and prepared me for the time when I would turn out as a Journeyman. Being a second-generation sheet metal worker helped a lot too. I could always ask my dad for help on and off the clock.

I like to spend time with my wife, Annoma. We go exploring places that we have not been before. It is kind of a precursor to retirement. I also like to spend time with my daughter Amanda and her family—it is great watching the grand kids grow up. My passion is building things, so I spend time in my woodshop when I can.

# SUICIDE PREVENTION AWARENESS

Suicide is a major health and safety issue and the Construction Industry is at a particularly high risk. Here is why we should make suicide prevention a priority:

- Over 41,000 suicides occur each year making it the 10th highest cause of death for all ages (CDC).
- Each year, self-inflicted injury accounts for 836,000 emergency department visits (CDC).
- Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for men 25-54 in the United States (CDC).
- More people die from suicide than from motor vehicle crashes (CDC).

## INDUSTRY SPECIFIC RISKS

- Construction has the Highest Number of Male Suicide Deaths.
- The CDC reports that 20% of all men who die by suicide were in construction/extraction.
- The construction industry has the second highest suicide rate of any industry in the US.



In 2018, the rate of suicides in construction was **5X** greater than the rate for all fatal work-related injuries.

## WHY ARE CONSTRUCTION PROFESSIONALS AT RISK



**Nature  
of the Job**



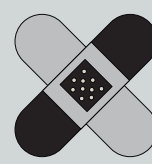
**Fearlessness**



**Substance  
Misuse**



**Access to  
Lethal Means**



**Mental &  
Physical Pain**

## WARNING SIGNS

Some behaviors may indicate a person is at immediate risk for suicide. The following should prompt you to call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or a mental health professional.

1. Talking about wanting to die or to kill oneself, such as: *"I just can't take it anymore."* or *"What's the use?"*
2. Looking for ways to kill oneself, such as searching online or getting a gun.
3. Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live.

Other behaviors may also indicate serious risk, especially if the behavior is new, has increased; and/or seems related to a painful event, loss, or change.

- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings (SPRC)

## PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- Culture that promotes the importance of safety
- Emphasis on teamwork
- Culture of employee engagement and connectedness, (a sense of "brotherhood")
- Culture of wellness that values mental health
- Access to insurance and mental health care (e.g., Employee Assistance Program)
- Informational support systems (buddy systems)
- Leadership/Supervisor training



## WSCC CARES

WSCC is pleased to introduce "WSCC Cares"—articles that highlight examples of the volunteer activities and events our valued contractors participate in that demonstrate their generosity to help their local communities.

### ICM Participates in "Wish for Wheels"

In late August, Industrial Constructors/Managers, Inc. (ICM) spent a wonderful day building and delivering 75 bikes to second graders at Alsup Elementary School in Adams 14 district, which is located just down the street from ICM's Commerce City office.



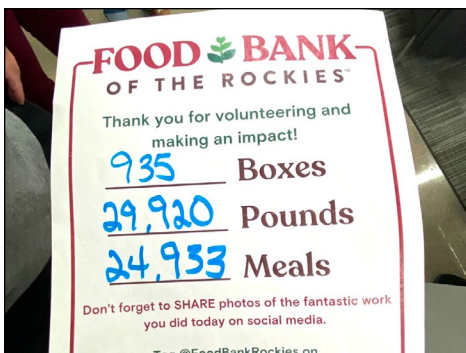
ICM built the bikes with help from Sturgeon Electric Company, Inc., and Wish for Wheels coordinated the donation as part of their mission to equip kids from Title 1 schools with their own bikes and helmets so that they can experience the freedom,

independence and success that comes with riding a bike. Thirty of ICM's employees participated in the event, joining 30 employees from Sturgeon Electrical Company.



### Food Bank of the Rockies

Several ICM employees recently volunteered at the Food Bank of the Rockies, packing 935 boxes of food.



### LUKE GLOWACKI *Outstanding Apprentice*

Luke Glowacki is a plumber apprentice with Local 145 in Grand Junction. Luke chose the trade because of the earn-while-you-learn model and accreditation. Luke's favorite part of his experience has been meeting people and traveling. He has been positively impacted by classmates and journeymen. Luke has made his way into construction design which allows him to problem solve. In the next 5 to 10 years, Luke sees himself in his current position. Luke looks up to his dad who has emphasized the importance of hard work throughout his life.

## CONTRACTOR HIGHLIGHT

For the past 35 years, American Mechanical Services (AMS) has been a leading company in the commercial HVAC and plumbing service industry in Colorado. Since the day we opened our doors in 1980, AMS has sought to grow our business by developing long lasting employee and business relationships. We regiment ourselves to listen intently, provide unmatched work ethic, to be prompt and irrefutable in the delivery of our service to our clients. We have several customer relationships that demonstrate this philosophy and exemplify our low turnover rate including: Denver Housing Authority (customer since 2001), Vail Resorts (customer since 1997), HCA Health One Properties (customer since 2003), State of Colorado (DORA) (customer since 2001), Park Meadows Mall (customer since 1997).

With each one of the above relationships, the same core group of AMS employees have been involved with the management and/or servicing of these properties. This has been an effective approach, instilling trust and comfort that the AMS team is truly looking out for the best interest of our customers, and that we have an active role in their success.

In the heart of our company culture is a dedication to integrity and transparency. Whether dealing with clients, employees, or partners, the company upholds the highest ethical standards. This commitment has been a driving force behind our longstanding relationships with clients, built on trust and reliability.

One distinctive aspect of our approach to workforce development is the emphasis on the development of apprentices. We believe in investing in the next

generation of skilled professionals, providing apprentices with hands-on experience and mentorship to foster their growth in the industry. Our current management team consists of former apprentices that have elevated their careers to positions of General, Operations and Service Manager. This commitment to apprenticeship programs not only ensures a pipeline of highly trained talent for us but also provides career advancement pathways to the broader community for aspiring HVAC and plumbing service professionals.

Our approach cultivates lasting relationships with field personnel because our managers can personally relate to the experience of being a service professional. Shared industry knowledge between management and

technicians helps provide prompt solutions to customer concerns and facility's needs.

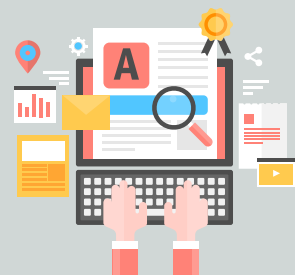
Equally important to us is the advancement of the industry as a whole. Our employees

actively participate in various industry groups such as RMMCA, Local Union Joint Apprenticeship Training Committees, Local 208 Certified Journeyperson Training Committee, Local Union Certified Instructors, BOMA, IREM, ASHRAE as well as being trade partners with various energy and environmental groups.

We strive to stand as a beacon of quality and innovation in HVAC/Plumbing services, driven by a culture that values people, integrity, and forward-thinking approaches. Through our commitment to apprenticeships and ongoing employee development, we not only meet the need of our clients but actively contribute to the growth and sustainability of the industry as a whole.



## WSSC INVITES YOU TO SUBMIT STORIES FOR OUR NEXT NEWSLETTER



- Outstanding Apprentice Highlight
- Outstanding Instructor Highlight
- Contractor Highlight
- Project Highlight
- WSSC Cares Highlight

Please contact Jordyn Grote at [jordyn@westernstatescollege.org](mailto:jordyn@westernstatescollege.org) for information.