



News Release



For Immediate Release

Cumberland County Public Information Office
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Training Program Targets Veterans for Pipeline Foreman Jobs

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. – A nine-week training program developed by Mears Construction, in conjunction with Fayetteville Technical Community College and the Cumberland County N.C. Works Career Center, is putting military veterans on the fast track to management careers in the gas distribution industry.

The program is the brainchild of Josh Bieler, director of veterans training for Mears Construction, based in Kansas City, Mo. Bieler contacted the Cumberland County N.C. Works Career Center and Fayetteville Technical Community College in August with a proposal to bring industry professionals from around the state and across the country together to train the veterans to be pipeline foreman.

“We have a need for employees and wanted to put together a program to bring veterans into our company,” Bieler said. Of the 16 students, one is a woman, 15 are military veterans, two were homeless and one is a former government contract employee.

The first class started in October and 16 students will graduate Dec. 16. The graduates will begin on-the-job training in January with Mears Construction and work on projects for Piedmont Natural Gas in the Charlotte area. A new class will start at FTCC on Jan. 17.

The students are competing in a heavy-equipment rodeo today at James River Equipment, 5039 U.S.-301 in Hope Mills. The skills they are practicing, such as avoiding obstacles, are directly transferrable to their new jobs. James River and other companies like McElroy Fusion, Consolidated Pipe and Supply Company, Hertz, Carolina Trucking Academy and John Deere have provided instruction and supplies to ensure the students receive the training experience necessary to achieve success in the field.

FTCC hosts the program on campus, and the Cumberland County N.C. Works Career Center covered the tuition costs and provided steel-toe boots and other supplies for the students. The Cumberland County Workforce Development Board, through the N.C. Works Career Center, will reimburse Mears Construction for the students’ salaries for up to six months.

India Mitchell of Houston, Texas, served four years in the Army. She was a petroleum specialist before she got out of the Army at Fort Bragg.

“I wanted to see what this opportunity had to offer,” Mitchell said. “I figured since I was a petroleum specialist in the Army and this training is for gas field distribution, it wouldn’t be too far-fetched for me to transition.”

Jamaar Watkins, a Florida native now living in Fayetteville, served 13 years in the Army as a petroleum specialist. He deployed four times – twice to Afghanistan and twice to Iraq – and was medically discharged in 2014.

“I’m doing this training because it is a great opportunity and I like working with my hands,” Watkins said. “It’s been a tough transition from soldier to civilian, but this training has given me the opportunity to make the transition more comfortable,” Watkins said.

John Runyan of Sanford is a motor transport operator in the Army National Guard. He is currently unemployed and looking forward to working for Mears upon graduation from the training program.

“This training is a good opportunity,” Runyan said. “It’s giving me the experience of being able to operate this equipment, being smooth with my operation and making sure everybody around me is safe.”

For more information about the pipeline foreman training program and other opportunities for veterans seeking employment, contact the N.C. Works Career Center of Cumberland County at 910-323-3421.



India Mitchell operates a backhoe during a heavy equipment rodeo today at James River Equipment in Hope Mills. Mitchell is one of 16 students enrolled in a nine-week training program to help train military veterans for management careers in the gas distribution industry. The training program was developed by Mears Construction, in conjunction with Fayetteville Technical Community College and the Cumberland County N.C. Works Career Center. The first class started in October and 16 students will graduate Dec. 16. The graduates will begin on-the-job training in January with Mears Construction and work on projects for Piedmont Natural Gas in the Charlotte area. A new class will start at FTCC on Jan. 17. Mitchell, of Houston, is an Army veteran who served four years in the Army as a petroleum specialist. She was stationed at Fort Bragg when she exited the Army and began her transition into the civilian work force.



Students operate backhoes and excavators during a heavy equipment rodeo today at James River Equipment in Hope Mills. Sixteen students are enrolled in a nine-week program to help train military veterans for management careers in the gas distribution industry. The training program was developed by Mears Construction, in conjunction with Fayetteville Technical Community College and the Cumberland County N.C. Works Career Center. The first class started in October and 16 students will graduate Dec. 16. The graduates will begin on-the-job training in January with Mears Construction and work on projects for Piedmont Natural Gas in the Charlotte area. A new class will start at FTCC on Jan. 17.

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