

Norwalk Citizen

NCC's BEST program is helping people reinvent themselves

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Eric Gribin, center with mustard colored jacket, and Steven Berko, senior project manager, Summerview Development Group (red hard hat), talk to students in NCC's BEST program at the Summerview site in Norwalk. Photo: Contributed Photo / Norwalk Citizen

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David Clark was a roofer for 28 years before an ailing economy began to take its toll on a career that had always been steady for the Norwalk resident.

So Clark set out to do what many others did to make ends meet in the harsh climate following the worst economic downturn since The Great Depression -- he began to reinvent himself.

"Everything will be going green," he said, referring to the building construction methods of the 21st century.

Now, Clark is enrolled in [Norwalk Community College's Building Efficiency and Sustainable Technology \(BEST\) Certificate Program](#), which prepares students for "green collar" jobs in sustainable building, building performance auditing and retrofitting, and alternative energy technology. The program also prepares students to qualify for the [Home Energy Rating System \(HERS\)](#) and the [Building Analyst Certifications](#) -- nationally recognized accreditations required to perform home and building energy ratings and audits.

On Monday morning, Clark and students from NCC's blueprint reading course, as well as other students in the blueprint reading course not seeking certificates through BEST but instead other "green" degrees from NCC, visited the Summerview Square community construction site in the W. Main St. corridor of Norwalk. Students visited the site to gain a real world understanding of some of the principles they are exploring in class.

"It's teaching us about green building techniques and renewable energy," Clark said of the BEST program. "The visit was very interesting to me....It's one thing to learn about blueprints, but it's another thing to go out there and see how it's done."

The students toured Summerview, observing both finished and unfinished units, and also had the opportunity to study blueprints of the community.

Summerview Square has been named 2010 Community of the Year by the Home Builders Association of Connecticut (HBACT). The HBACT has also awarded Summerview Development Group two HOBI -- Home Building Industry Awards for "Best Rental Community" and "Best Rental Unit." Summerview Square is being built in four phases in the neighborhood surrounding West Main Street, Summer Street and Jefferson Street. The first phase, consisting of 13 one, two and three-bedroom apartments and townhomes, officially opened in August. The community is a combination Shingle, Colonial and Victorian-style townhomes and multi-unit apartments, each with a front porch and a sidewalk that links the neighborhood together.

"We discussed a lot about the framing phase of building," Clark said.

And while Clark added he's not exactly sure which career path he'll pursue once his BEST certificate is in hand, he did say, "There's always more to learn. There are always going to be more and better technologies."

BEST program enrollee and Easton resident John Hamlin said, "I'm changing careers. I was in the corporate world for 12 years as an IT manager. I wanted to get out of the confines of a desk job."

Hamlin said he looks to finish the certificate program within two years, and added that while he likes the idea of pursuing a career path in home inspection, "I want to go beyond that."

"[The visit to Summerview Square] was a great opportunity to get a hands-on experience....One of the things that stood out to me was a lot of things were done through a common sense approach. I was impressed with what I saw."

Intelligent additions, like Energy Star appliances, bolster the appeal of the Summerview units, Hamlin said.

Norwalk Mayor Richard Moccia, Norwalk Planning Director Michael Wrinn, Summerview Development Group partner Andrew LaSala, NCC professor and BEST program coordinator Eric Gribin, architect Ray Sullivan and others involved in the project spoke to the students Monday morning and answered questions.

"We get a lot of career changers," Gribin said of BEST students. "People can learn skills that are applicable to the sustainable energy and design fields."

About 20 students attended the Summerview tour, he said. This is the first visit BEST students have taken to a local construction site.

"Blueprint reading is an art in and of itself," Gribin said. "The students were really appreciative, and I got a lot of good feedback."

NCC students are able to earn the 26 credit BEST Certificate in just two semesters. The program includes well-established courses from the College's Architectural Engineering and Construction Technology programs as well as new courses in Building Efficiency Auditing, Sustainable Energy for Residences and Businesses, and Alternative and Renewable Energy. The BEST Program is designed for displaced workers and job-changers, as well as those looking to expand their knowledge and skills to become employable in the green energy field.

BEST also draws upon exclusive partnerships with local and regional businesses, and experts in the field of sustainable design, building, energy efficiency auditing and weatherization to provide internship/job-shadowing and employment opportunities for program graduates.

Registration spring classes for all students begins on Tuesday, Jan. 4. Check the Spring Class Schedule posted on the NCC website at www.ncc.commnet.edu for additional registration dates throughout the month of January. Spring classes begin on Friday, Jan. 21.

Financial aid may be available to students interested in the BEST Certificate Program, or they may qualify for a "Workforce Scholarship" toward tuition.

For information on NCC's new Building Efficiency and Sustainable Technology (BEST) Certificate Program, contact program director Eric Gribin at: egribin@ncc.commnet.edu, or visit the BEST website at: www.ncc.commnet.edu/aad/best.