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NCC students take educational construction tour

NORWALK
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Hour Staff Writer

Students from Norwalk Community College donned hard hats Monday for an educational tour of the ongoing construction at Summerview Square.

"One hands-on experience is equivalent to 100 classes," said 20-year-old Matt Maguire, of Stamford, who joined about a dozen peers from Blueprint

Reading class for the field trip. "It might take permission slips and more effort from the teacher and students, but to be able to come here, touch the lumber, ask the people working on the ducts what they're doing — it's invaluable."

Guided by Senior Project Manager Steven Berko, the students climbed through one of the unfinished townhouses that will eventually comprise the 63-unit rental

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Hour photo / ALEX von KLEYDORFF

Summerview Square development Senior Project Manager Steven Berko talks to a group of Norwalk Community College students inside a rental unit under construction in Norwalk.

NCC students tour construction

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community. The project is slated for completion within the next two years.

All the students who participated Monday are working toward associate degrees in construction technology or certification in Building Efficiency & Sustainable Technology. They were joined by Professor Eric M. Gribin, who teaches Blueprint Reading and oversees the BEST program. Its linchpin, he said, is sustainability and preparing graduates to enter the emerging "green collar" workforce.

"This is the future of the building business, and the students know it," he said. "McGraw-Hill estimates that, by 2014, retrofitting is going to quadruple in cost. And that's just correcting what's wrong."

He added: "The more we move toward efficiency and employing those who are knowledgeable in the field, the more we lower our depend-

ence."

The school launched its two-semester program for BEST certification in January, Gribin said, after the Department of Labor distributed grants for that purpose to community colleges throughout Connecticut. About 40 students are enrolled, he said.

As well as learning to read blueprints, the students learn about composition, building technology, alternative and renewable energy sources, environmental science, auditing and sustainable energy for residence and business construction.

As they made their way Monday through the stripped-down unit on West Main Street, the students pitched a multitude of questions about green-friendly aspects of the construction and learned how the Summerview Development Group has been using recycled materials, for instance, and energy-efficient insulation that strives to meet the highest

standards.

"I joined the program to learn how I could introduce sustainable techniques to my current job," said 36-year-old Sharon Smith, of Norwalk. "Being sustainable has become a lifestyle."

The trip was made possible through collaboration with Norwalk and the development group, Gribin said. Summerview Square has been named 2010 Community of the Year by the Home Builders Association of Connecticut and its development team worked closely with The West Main Street Neighborhood Association to determine aesthetics.

Andrew LaSala Jr., the director of development, said the experience benefits his employees as much as the students. "We're trying to demonstrate what we call the 'friendly development' concept," he said. "We partner with neighbors to give the community a soul."