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Construction / Skilled Trades Report – October 26, 2018

This past Friday, October 26th, we kicked off our first **Skills for Life** trip of the 2018-2019 school year. This is the fourth year that the Bridge Youth Center has run this program and we are excited about the opportunities this year has to offer. The gist of this program is to introduce local career opportunities, in various industries, to our students. We have found that many students approaching their senior year of high school are unsure if college is the right choice for them - many are looking for an alternative method to build a career. Students tend to be oblivious to the opportunities our community has to offer. Whether that is manufacturing, construction, or health services to name a few, our goal is to visit these businesses and start networking and building relationships for students who may be interested in a specific field.

Our first of four stops for the day directed us to **T2 Construction**. We met at a condominium project they are working on off 112th street in Zeeland. When we arrived, we met Mike Van Klompenberg. Mike is a project manager at T2 and oversees the construction of Point Lake condominiums where we were located. T2 consists of general contractors and project managers who subcontract out specific trades for a given project. Mike walked us through five different stages of construction for various units on site. We started with viewing a unit that only had the concrete foundation poured. Mike shared that this was essentially the first phase of the building. Excavators, concrete guys, and plumbers all work together to make sure the foundation is set for the framers to start building the walls and the roof. We then walked over to a unit that was all framed up with siding partially installed. We got a chance to see how walls are formed throughout the building – such as bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchen, living room etc. Students were intrigued by this process, as well as visualizing a building with just studs and no drywall. While we were at this unit, we stopped and talked with the siding guys. We asked them questions about their job and they gave us some valuable feedback. In a nutshell, a starting wage for an entry level sider with no experience would be about \$11/hr. Furthermore, this wage can increase rapidly if you work hard and are willing to learn and grow. It is that simple. Next, we walked through a unit that was just drywalled and ready for priming. Mike briefly talked about how the drywall process works and the different opportunities within the trade. Following this unit, we walked over to a unit that some finish carpenters were working on. Mike and the carpenters talked about how after a unit is drywalled and primed, the finish carpenters will come and install the cabinets, doors, and trim. This is a very detail-oriented position that is slower paced than a framing carpenter. All the work the trim carpenters do is visible and must look pristine for the homeowner. While at this unit, we also chatted with Nate Genzink, the landscaper on site. Nate talked about opportunities in landscaping and what

makes a good employee. Nate briefly shared that social media is a large aspect within the hiring process. Employers will view applicants' social media page to determine their character. He also stated that hard work and a willingness to learn are key in a successful employee. Finally, Mike walked us through a completed unit that was about move-in ready. He talked about the painting process, as well as carpet and interior design. Students were shocked at how modern and finalized the unit appeared. They were happy that they got to see a unit from beginning to end in various stages. This helped them understand the different phases of development that takes place when constructing a building. As a whole, the students really enjoyed our visit to T2 Construction. Their eyes were opened to the opportunities available in many different trades. They also understand the components that make a good employee. Hard work, teachability, and promptness are all pre-requisites to success



Our second stop of the day brought us to **Macatawa Plumbing**. When we arrived, we met with owner Nate VanderZwaag. Nate introduced himself and the company and gave the students a little background of the plumbing industry. Macatawa has roughly 20 employees, 2 of which perform service work, and the other 18 perform plumbing on commercial and residential jobs. An entry-level position consists of apprenticing a journeyman in the field or performing shop work in the warehouse. This position typically pays \$13/hr to start and can grow exponentially once a journeyman's license is acquired. Within the plumbing industry, a licensed journeyman requires 6000 hours of on the job apprenticing and completion of the journeyman's test. Nate shared that a servicing plumber tends to make a little more money than an installation plumber in new construction. Yes, this is because of potentially working in dirty and gross conditions. Nate also shared that a plumber needs to be able to make decisions on the fly and have a lot of common sense, along with enjoying working outside and with your hands. After our visit at Macatawa's shop, Nate relocated us to one of their current jobs, so the students could get the chance to see first-hand some of the work that a plumber does. We entered a recently constructed parking garage off 9th street, downtown Holland. We parked at the civic center and walked across River St. to enter the garage. We



entered the main level and looked at some massive pipes that they had installed. Nate shared that even though the parking garage does not have any bathrooms in it, plumbing is still required. Macatawa installed large drainage pipes throughout the parking garage running on all levels. These drainage pipes help alleviate rain water from pooling up inside the garage and further damaging it in the future. After showing us the garage, Nate walked us right outside the building to a street that they were installing snow melt. Macatawa Plumbing's subsidiary company Macatawa Radiant handles all snow melt installation. Snow melt is essentially the plumbing that goes underneath sidewalks and streets to heat them and keep snow/ice off them in the winter. Nate showed us the tubing that runs underneath the pavement and explained the process in good detail. Nate showed us two aspects of plumbing that most people do not think about – drainage, and snow melt. All in all, our students learned a lot about the components that go into plumbing; not all plumbers are the stereotypical service plumbers that are fixing pipes and working with feces. Again, the kids were excited about the opportunities within the industry.

After lunch, we met up with **GDK Construction** to talk about opportunities and look at some local projects that they are doing. We first arrived at their office in downtown Holland to grab hard hats. We then walked down 8th St. to tour some local projects that they are managing. GDK, like T2, only offers construction management and contracting services. They do not directly employ labor under the GDK name - instead they sub contract out the different labor and trades on the job. This means that there may be numerous different companies all doing different tasks on the job, but all still working for GDK. We first arrived at a new apartment complex that GDK is developing and managing. We were just able to view it from the outside, but we saw the masons installing brick which was an interesting site. Brick installation is quite a process and it was fascinating to see how the masons all worked together efficiently. Following the apartments, we walked a bit further down the road and entered a new movie theatre complex. GDK is managing the construction for this project as well. This movie theatre will have 11 theatres that will seat about 25-45 people. The theatres will also have a food menu with a wait staff.



Although, the building that is being constructed is not solely a movie theatre. It will have three other restaurant/shops in it as well. We were able to go inside the building and watch some framers and electricians work. The students were amazed at how large the building was and how complex the construction and architecture is. The project manager talked about how parts of the building sit below the water table. This means that they had to excavate and pump out the water and then pour concrete over top, all while making sure nothing leaks. It was fascinating to hear and see. We also witnessed a crane lifting material all the way to the top of the roof. The students were thrilled to see this taking place; many had never seen a crane that close before. The project manager talked about the shortage that the industry is seeing in crane operators and the large benefits that crane operators acquire. Many can make over \$100/hr. After touring the movie theatre, we walked across River st. and toured the Civic Center. This renovation of the civic center is a project that GDK just finished. We walked all

through the building and saw the magnificent update to a great community center. Many of the students remembered what it was like before it was renovated, so they were amazed at what it looks like now in its completion. The project manager told us that they wanted to give it a fresh look while not forgetting the history behind the building. They reused a lot of old material and displayed various historic features such as the old bleachers and the old civic center letters. It was cool for the students to see an exterior phase, an interior phase, and a completed phase. This helped them better understand the steps in the construction process. All in all, the students really enjoyed the visit to GDK. While visiting sites, we were able to use our senses to help understand the components that make up the commercial construction industry. It was neat to see various trades working together and the career opportunities that they have.



We arrived at **Zeeland Lumber and Supply** for our final stop of the day. We were initially met by Vice President Mark Vanden Bosch. Mark led us on a tour of their warehouses, product gallery, and their custom wood shop. The students were able to see how each product is picked and packed and how the use of bar code scanners and increased technology, help keep inventory organized and accurate. We also where able to see their dispatch room where they facilitate all product delivery. They use tracking devices that can see exactly where each one of their trucks are on the road and how long it is taking them to deliver an order. This helps maintain efficiency and accuracy. Following our tour, Mark and led us back into the offices to discuss details about Zeeland Lumber and Supply and the industry at large. Mark talked about the growing industry of homes and services, as well as, the constraints that are hindering further growth for the future of the industry. Zeeland Lumber has tripled its size in the last 5-7 years and now has 6 locations, 430 employ ees, and 50+ delivery trucks on the road. Mark shared with the students that they offer many different job positions with great advancement opportunities that do not require a four-year college education. The biggest thing that Zeeland Lumber looks for when hiring is being a responsible employee i.e. showing up on time and working with integrity. Also, simply working hard is the biggest asset that Zeeland Lumber’s employees have. Hard work will allow you to



advance quicker and allow for additional responsibilities to be given with higher pay. Not only did Mark talk about the company of Zeeland lumber itself, but he shared about the growing industry of Homes and Services in general. He stated that the industry is booming right now and that is why Zeeland Lumber has grown so drastically in the past few years, however, there are some constraints. The largest constraint is that young people are not drawn to the industry like they were in the past. The average age of workers in the skilled trade sector is 50+ years old. Because there is a lack of employees

entering the market, as workers exit, the overall supply of workers decreases. A lack of available workers results in limited business because you can only grow as fast as the people available to do the jobs. Mark really tried to motivate our group to consider the industry as a career so that the new generation of workers can keep up with the demand. All in all, the students really enjoyed their time at Zeeland Lumber and Supply and found value in learning about the opportunities Zeeland Lumber has to offer, as well as, the homes/services industry.



Special thanks to T2 Construction, Macatawa Plumbing, GDK Construction, and Zeeland Lumber & Supply for allowing us to visit your facilities and learn about your fields!

Student Comments:

“I really enjoyed seeing multiple condo units all in different stages. I was able get a better idea of how a condo gets built”

“I had no idea you could make that much money as a plumber”

“It seems like there is a lot of job opportunity in the trades”

“I liked the work atmosphere of construction”

“Construction Management seems very stressful but rewarding at the same time”

“I had no idea Zeeland Lumber was that big. They have a lot of career opportunities too”

“The civic center looks amazing!”